

SPECIAL ISSUE

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INDIA TODAY



HOPE & FEAR

14 EXPERTS ON WHAT LIES AHEAD FOR INDIA AND THE WORLD

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We entered 2022 with a sense of déjà vu because the new year seems a lot like the year gone by. Covid-19 cases are rising again and a far more contagious strain of the novel coronavirus is spreading across the globe. The good thing, though, is that two years on, Covid-19 is no longer an unknown unknown. We know the nature of the beast and experienced the worst of it last year when the Delta variant tore across India, triggering the second wave of infections, aggravated by an acute medical oxygen crisis and black fungus cases, all of which collectively killed over 200,000 people in the country. We are now far better prepared with vaccine stocks and the government's booster dose programme. Covid-19 has claimed 5.4 million lives globally, just a tenth of the estimated 50 million deaths from the 1918 influenza pandemic, also referred to as the 'Spanish flu'. The outbreak raged for about two years and infected a third of humanity.

The new Omicron strain of Covid, from all available evidence, is milder than Delta. That's a relief. Although we are still in the midst of the pandemic, we seem to be much better off. But this should not breed complacency. Viruses seldom behave the way you want them to. The world today has four times the population it had a century ago and is far more interconnected. One study finds that the global economy could lose almost \$3 trillion (Rs 223 lakh crore) due to Covid-19. It is projected to grow at 4.3 per cent in 2022, slightly below the 5.8 per cent it achieved last year (after -3.3 per cent in 2020). The International Monetary Fund (IMF) estimates global GDP losses could rise to \$5.3 trillion (Rs 393 lakh crore) over five years with several million lives lost. Strong economic growth is a key imperative for India if it is to pull more people out of poverty.

The pandemic's trajectory, particularly its linkage with the wellness of people, will be the most important factor determining global economic recovery in 2022. In addition to these two intertwined concerns, India has a third sharp end of a threat triangle to deal with—China. In May 2020, a belligerent Beijing shredded three decades of peace and tranquillity protocols when it moved heavy military units to the boundary in eastern Ladakh, where both sides remain entrenched.

Apart from concerns of health, economy and security, several other factors will weigh on the minds of the political establishment in 2022. This year, we celebrate the 75th anniversary of our independence. There will be elections to the office of the President and Vice-President and to seven state assemblies. The BJP is in power in six of these states, including Prime Minister Modi's home state of Gujarat. The party's strategy to fight anti-incumbency will be closely watched.

There are, however, more long-term concerns in the year ahead and beyond. Our special issue, '2022: Hope & Fear', put together by Editor (Features) Kai Friese, looks at these concerns through insights from a panel of experts in their particular fields. For instance, virologist Gangandee Kang

says science and public health, supported by policy, need to be at the forefront of our control endeavours because the threat from global waves of SARS-CoV-2 variants is not going away. China watcher Andrew Small explains that Beijing now has a greater appetite for escalating crises than it did in the past and thinks it can live with antagonistic relationships on multiple fronts. Former foreign secretary Shyam Saran believes 2022 will be more unpredictable and hopes for it to be India's year of a revitalised Act East policy and engagement with economic blocs, such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). Financial strategist Neelkanth Mishra feels India should seize the opportunity and focus on increasing its share of global trade, both in services and merchandise.



January 11, 2021



January 18, 2021

Economist Jahangir Aziz outlines five broad trends to watch for—Covid-19 turning endemic, the impact of COP26 commitments on future energy sources, a policy regime change in China, the permanent damage caused by the Covid pandemic, and global electoral cycles in the next few years. Environmentalist Sunita Narain says it is time for India to reinvent growth without pollution by designing a more resource efficient, affordable and sustainable climate change model. Former agriculture secretary Siraj Hussain and researcher Shweta Saini write about how the farmers' agitation against the central farm laws should not be seen as the end of the road for agricultural reforms. For technologist Rohan Murty, a major theme of 2022 will be deploying tech to improve people's experience at work.

The RSS, the BJP's ideological parent, will celebrate 100 years of its existence in 2025. According to RSS ideologue Ram Madhav, the challenge for the organisation will be to find a balance between pride and anger, ensuring that neither spills over. Author and Trinamool Congress leader Pavan K.

Varma, however, argues that Hindutva aims to overturn the inclusiveness and eclecticism of Hinduism. Group Editorial Director (Publishing) Raj Chengappa writes about the need for the Modi government to stay the course on economic reforms. Senior advocate Arvind P. Datar says India must nurture the institutional independence of courts and tribunals if it wants to be treated on par with the great western democracies while globalisation specialist Parag Khanna sees the waves of migrating Indians as reshaping the world. Finally, sports writer Sharda Ugra predicts that the new year will be one of a resurgence of Indian athletes across all sport.

This is truly a galaxy of fine writers and if you want to know the direction the country and the world are taking, or ought to be taking, this special issue is a must read. Enjoy. ■

(Aron Purie)

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UPFRONT

SHAILESH ANDRADE/REUTERS



FAMILY POWER
(R-L) Mukesh and Nita Ambani
with their children Isha, Anant
and Akash at the Reliance
AGM in Mumbai. File

RELIANCE INDUSTRIES

A GENERATIONAL LEAP

By M.G. Arun

Reliance Industries (RIL) chairman and managing director Mukesh Ambani recently said it was time for a leadership change at India's largest private sector company, which totted up annual revenues of Rs 5.39 lakh crore in 2020-21. Ambani, 64, has been with RIL since 1981, when his father Dhirubhai Ambani pulled him out of an MBA programme at Stanford Universi-

ty to help build a petrochemicals plant at Patalganga in Maharashtra. Mukesh was 24 then. Just over two decades later, in 2002, he took over the reins of RIL following Dhirubhai's death.

Over the past few years, Ambani has been working to get his three children—twins Isha and Akash, 30, and Anant, 26—to take up leadership roles in the company. But he has also set up a framework to groom future

leaders from outside the family, who can potentially leapfrog to leadership positions at an appropriate time. "Reliance is in the process of effecting a momentous leadership transition—from seniors belonging to my generation to the next generation of young leaders," Ambani said on Reliance Family Day (December 28), an annual event to commemorate Dhirubhai's birthday. It was quite clear he wanted to see his

BRACING FOR A TRANSITION

RIL BOARD



MUKESH AMBANI, 64
Chairman & MD

EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS

Nikhil R. Meswani
Hital R. Meswani
P.M.S. Prasad
Pawan Kumar Kapil

NON-EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS

Nita Ambani
Dipak C. Jain
R.A. Mashelkar
Adil Zainulbhai
R.S. Gujral
Shumeet Banerji
Arundhati Bhattacharya
K.V. Chowdary
Yasir O. Al-Rumayyan

THE AMBANI SCIONS



AKASH AMBANI, 30
Director, Reliance Jio
Infocomm and Reliance
Retail Ventures



ISHA AMBANI, 30
Director, Reliance Jio
Infocomm and Reliance
Retail Ventures



ANANT AMBANI, 26
Director, Reliance
New Energy Solar

OTHER BUSINESS HEADS/ LEADERS

Industry veterans in the 50-65 age group

DIGITAL SERVICES

SANJAY MASHRUWALA & MATHEW OOMMEN
Presidents, Reliance Jio

PANKAJ PAWAR
Business Head, Jio



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MD, Reliance Retail
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CEO, food &
grocery retail

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P.K. KAPIL
Executive Director
SANJIV SINGH
Group President

SRINIVAS TUTTAGUNTA
Director



FINANCE

ALOK AGARWAL
Group CFO



SRIKANTH VENKATACHARI
Group Joint CFO

SOME FUTURE LEADERS

In the 35-50 age group, being groomed for bigger roles

ANSHUMAN THAKUR
Head of strategy,
Reliance Jio

KAUSHAL NEVREKAR
Chief Business Officer,
Reliance Digital

SAURABH SANCHETI
CFO, Jio Platforms

RAJ MULICK
Chief Accounts
Officer, RIL

ASHWIN KHASGIWALA
CFO, Reliance Retail

KIRAN THOMAS
President, Jio

SANJAY ROY
Head, deepwater oil &
gasfields assets

ASHISH LODHA & AAYUSH BHATNAGAR
Senior V-Ps, Jio
Platforms

R. SRINIVASAN
President-revenue
and commercial
operations, Jio

SOUMYA DUTTA
Head of treasury

UPFRONT

children take over the RIL reins, supported by a mix of professionals and family loyalists. "I have no doubt that Akash, Isha and Anant, as the next-gen leaders, will lead Reliance to even greater heights," he said.

Ambani may have ideally wanted to give more time to his children to learn the ropes, but for an impending deadline set by market regulator Sebi that companies should split their chairman and managing director positions by April 2022, to enable greater transparency and accountability. While it is not clear yet how the leadership positions would be divided, RIL sources say Ambani, post the transition, intends to focus on Reliance Foundation's work.

When Ambani took over as CMD, RIL had a gross turnover of Rs 65,061 crore and a net profit of Rs 4,104 crore. Much has changed since then. From an industrial giant largely dependent on petrochemicals, RIL made three major diversifications over the years—first into oil and gas, and then into consumer-focused businesses such as retail and, most recently, telecom. This transition enabled it to multiply its revenues eight times over and post a net profit of Rs 53,739 crore in 2020-21.

RIL had a market capitalisation of Rs 16.25 lakh crore as on December 29, 2021, the highest among Indian companies. "Mukesh Ambani is doing the right thing for a systematic, structured succession at RIL. One should be willing to move on. You are responsible towards stakeholders, not shareholders or the family," says Prof. Kavil Ramachandran of the Indian School of Business, Hyderabad, adding that the Ambanis should earn their positions.

The next-generation Ambanis have been groomed for all the new-age businesses of the group—retail, digital, telecom and clean energy. Akash and Isha joined Reliance Jio Infocomm and Reliance Retail Ventures as directors at the age of 24. Isha, who graduated from Yale University with majors in psychology and South Asian studies in 2013, had a brief stint with McKinsey in the US. Akash, who graduated from Brown University with a major in

SPRAWLING PRESENCE

The RIL refinery at Jamnagar, Gujarat



AFP

economics, worked closely on RIL's 4G telecom venture before becoming a director at the group firms. Both Akash and Isha were key negotiators in mega deals that Jio Platforms, RIL's digital arm, struck with the likes of Google, Facebook and Intel to turn the group into a futuristic enterprise. They were also involved in all big acquisitions by Jio Platforms, including Den Networks, Hathway Cable and Datacom.

At Reliance Jio, Akash is involved in the development of products and digital services applications. He also handles sports businesses and runs the Indian Premier League team Mumbai Indians. Isha looks into consumer experience, branding and marketing, and also assists mother Nita Ambani at Reliance Foundation.

Anant is a graduate from Brown University and sits on the board of Reliance New Energy Solar Limited. He is slated to take a leadership role in the energy business and has been involved with the Jamnagar refinery

complex. While the revenues of RIL's oil to chemicals business declined 29 per cent in 2020-21 to Rs 3.2 lakh crore due to the pandemic-induced price correction, digital services posted Rs 90,287 crore in revenues, up from Rs 69,605 crore in 2019-20.

RIL is also building a leadership base outside the Ambani family. The RIL board, chaired by Mukesh Ambani, has four executive directors—Nikhil R. Meswani, Hital R. Meswani, P.M.S

THE NEXT-GENERATION AMBANIS HAVE BEEN GROOMED FOR ALL THE NEW-AGE BUSINESSES OF THE GROUP: RETAIL, DIGITAL, TELECOM AND CLEAN ENERGY. RIL IS ALSO BUILDING A LEADERSHIP BASE OUTSIDE THE FAMILY

Prasad and Pawan Kumar Kapil.

The nine non-executive/ independent directors are Nita Ambani, Arundhati Bhattacharya, K.V. Chowdary, Yasir O. Al-Rumayyan, Dipak C. Jain, R.A. Mashelkar, Adil Zainulbhai, R.S. Gajral and Shumeet Banerji.

Other senior professionals heading various departments or businesses present a mix of experience and young blood. There are industry veterans, in the 50-65 age group, such as Alok Agarwal, the group's chief financial officer; Subramaniam V., MD of Reliance Retail; Sanjay Mashruwala and Mathew Oommen, both presidents at Reliance Jio; and Pankaj Pawar, business head of Jio. The oil to chemicals business has P.K. Kapil as executive director, Sanjiv Singh as group president and Srinivas Tuttagunta as director.

These businesses further have a string of leaders in the 35-50 age bracket being groomed for bigger roles, such as Anshuman Thakur, head of strategy, Reliance Jio; Kaushal Nevrekar, chief business officer, Reliance Digital; Saurabh Sancheti, CFO at Jio Platforms; Raj Mulick, chief accounts officer of RIL; Ashwin Khasgiwala, CFO, Reliance Retail; Kiran Thomas, president, Jio; Ashish Lodha and Aayush Bhatnagar, senior vice-presidents at Jio Platforms; R. Srinivasan, president-revenue and commercial operations, Jio; Soumya Dutta, head of treasury; and Sanjay Roy, head of deepwater oil and gasfields assets.

ISB's Ramachandran says even if the Ambani scions are not fully ready, they can bank on this experienced team. RIL has put in place various grooming programmes. Its Career Acceleration Programme and Step-Up, the focused leadership transition support programme, are aimed at identifying leaders early and making them future-ready. Managers undertake cross-functional training. For instance, a finance professional may be exposed to operations, marketing and HR. Only those in the 30-35 age group are allowed to join the leadership programmes. The executives have mentors to help them gain exposure in a variety of roles. ■

FCRA

THE FOREIGN FUNDS SQUEEZE

By Kaushik Deka



On January 1, when the Union home ministry revoked the FCRA (Foreign Contribution Regulation Act) registrations—mandatory for organisations to receive and use foreign funding—of 5,968 firms, many were outraged. Critics said the move was aimed at crippling NGOs (non-government organisations) that have either been critical of the BJP-led central government or are run by minorities. Some of the organisations that lost their registrations include the Missionaries of Charity, set up by Nobel laureate Mother Teresa, the Medical Council of India, the India Islamic Centre, the Oxfam India Trust and Common Cause, which have filed several PILs against central legislation in recent times.

However, independent observers, including many who lost their FCRA registrations, say this is a consequence of amendments to the FCRA in 2020, which made the process of getting an FCRA registration cumbersome, opaque and dependent on the government's discretion, rather than malafide intent. "The new rules are making it very difficult for NGOs to operate," says Noel Harper of the Share and Care Foundation in Andhra Pradesh, which has challenged the constitutional validity of the FCRA 2020 in the Supreme Court. "The new laws are punishing even those who are doing good work." Of the 5,968 organisations removed

16,908 organisations in India are authorised to receive foreign funds under the FCRA, down from **22,797** last year

Between 2011 and 2021, the registration certificates of **20,586** organisations were cancelled for violations of the Foreign Contribution Regulation Act (FCRA), 2010; 89 were cancelled on request

Of these, **80 per cent** were cancelled under the NDA government between 2014 and 2021

from the FCRA list, 5,789 did not apply for renewal by the deadline—December 31. (FCRA registrations are valid for five years and must be renewed after that.) In fact, between September 29, 2020, and December 31, 2021, 18,778 organisations were eligible for licence renewal—of these, only 12,989 submitted requests for renewals. Some of the institutes that did not apply include two Indian Institutes of Technology (Delhi and Kanpur), the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library and the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts.

However, critics highlight that some registrations—including those of the Missionaries of Charity and the Oxfam India Trust—were cancelled, and did not lapse. On December 25, 2021, the Union home ministry refused to renew the registration of the Missionaries of Charity, citing "adverse inputs". A fresh application for registration can be made only after three years. On December 12, the Vadodara

city police, based on a complaint from a district social welfare officer, had filed a case against the Kolkata-based NGO under the Gujarat Freedom of Religion Act for "hurting Hindu religious sentiments" and "luring young girls toward Christianity" in a shelter home run by the organisation in Vadodara. In August, Priyank Kanoongo, chairman of the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights (NCPCR), claimed to have found evidence of conversions during a visit to the home in Vadodara. In February 2020, the NCPCR had also approached the Supreme Court asking for an investigation of the Missionaries of Charity for alleged involvement in child trafficking in its shelter homes in Jharkhand. However, allegations do not amount to violations of the law, and in this case, the law states that an FCRA registration can be denied only to those who have been prosecuted for or convicted of forced conversions.



Illustration by SIDDHANT JUMDE

Supreme Court, naming some NGOs where funds have allegedly been diverted or were received from suspicious sources. For now, the top court has not issued a verdict. There have been several legal challenges against cancellations of FCRA registrations—in 2016, the registration of the Lawyers' Collective, an NGO run by Additional Solicitor General Indira Jaising and her husband Anand Grover, was cancelled, with the government claiming that the organisation had used foreign funds for political purposes. The government also stated that Jaising had violated FCRA norms by receiving foreign funds. Under the FCRA, a government official cannot do so.

Since coming to power in 2014, the Narendra Modi government has often received international criticism for allegedly using FCRA to "stifle the voices" of activists and NGOs in India, particularly after the cancellation of the FCRA registrations of Greenpeace and Amnesty International. In September 2020, Amnesty International India had accused the Centre of having frozen its bank accounts as punishment for speaking out about alleged rights abuses. After its bank accounts were frozen, the organisation closed its India office.

The NDA government at the Centre pointed out how the FCRA registration of Amnesty International was cancelled by the previous UPA government in 2010 and has never been renewed. In fact, the primary rationale behind legislation of the FCRA was to tighten the scrutiny on the functioning of the NGOs. In 2012, the then UPA government used the FCRA rules to come down heavily on several NGOs protesting the Kudankulam nuclear power project. When the NDA came to power in 2014, the approach of the government towards the NGOs became evident. In the first month of the Modi government, the Intelligence Bureau submitted a classified report identifying several foreign-funded organisations which were "negatively impacting economic development" of India. ■

The FCRA was first enacted in 1976 to regulate the receipt and use of foreign funding. In 2010, the then UPA government at the Centre repealed it and passed a new law. Then, in 2020, the BJP-led government further amended the Act to tighten control over how foreign funding could be used. For instance, now, only 20 per cent of foreign funding can be used for administrative expenses—down from the earlier 50 per cent. If the government, based on an inquiry, believes that an organisation has violated FCRA provisions, it can prohibit it from receiving or using foreign funding even without the organisation being found guilty. The new rules also bar NGOs from transferring foreign funds received to other individuals or organisations. Critics say this rule has hit smaller NGOs in remote areas with no access to foreign funding, preventing them from getting help from bigger NGOs.

Harper, along with Joseph Lizy and Annamma Joachim of the National Workers Welfare Trust in Telangana, have argued in the Supreme Court that the 2020 amendments of the FCRA have severely restricted the use of foreign funds by NGOs for their mandated activities. "The government must simplify the rules. Else people naturally begin to suspect that there is something more behind these regulations," says Harper. The Centre has

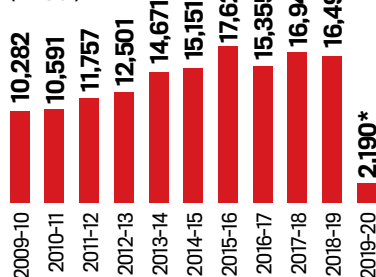
said these amendments were required to ensure that foreign funds were being used for their publicly stated purpose, and not for other uses that could harm the country. For one, it claims that funds received for development work are often diverted to train Maoists.

In support of the amendments, the NCPCR has filed an affidavit in the

THE QUANTUM OF FOREIGN FUNDS

Despite a marginal dip in annual foreign contributions since 2015-16, the total amount of foreign funding received between 2014 and 2020 has jumped by 39 per cent from the amount received between 2009 and 2014

Total foreign contributions received by NGOs (in Rs cr)



*Till March 16, 2021, as per the annual returns filed by NGOs
Sources: Estimating Philanthropic Capital in India, 2019 by the Centre for Social Impact and Philanthropy, Ashoka University and Lok Sabha data as on March 24, 2021

KANPUR I-T RAIDS

ON THE BLACK SCENT TRAIL

By Ashish Misra



It looked like a scene from the Ajay Devgn movie *Raid*, just that it was happening 80 km from Lucknow, in Kanpur. On December 23, a team of the Directorate General of GST Intelligence (DGGI), Ahmedabad, raided the house of Piyush Jain in the city's Anandpuri locality. Piyush, 51, is a manufacturer of chemical compounds used for flavouring in the pan masala industry. The DGGI officials had raided the house as part of a swoop on gutka manufacturers in a tax evasion case, when they realised that some of the walls were not quite aligned with the structure of the 3,000-plus sq ft mansion. In fact, they felt hollow.

When the walls were broken down, bundles of currency notes, packed in paper and polythene, tumbled out. Soon, there were so many bundles that officials had to requisition 17 counting machines to invoice the evidence. Eighty steel boxes and a container were needed to shift the money. The final tally: Rs 177.45 crore in cash. Another Rs 17 crore in cash, along with 23 kg of gold

and sandalwood oil worth Rs 6 crore, were recovered from the family's ancestral house on Jain Street in Chhippatti, Kannauj. Piyush was arrested under Sections 132(1) of the IPC and 69 of the Central GST Act. Sources at the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC) say the seizure could be a record for the agency.

Indian Revenue Service officer Vivek Prasad, currently with the DGGI, is reportedly the brain behind the successful operation. Prasad had in 2019 exposed the Rs 400 crore ITC (input tax credit) scam in Gujarat's Kandla Port. He had earlier done stints in Kanpur and Lucknow and was quite familiar with the goings-on in the pan masala business.

It all started about two months ago when DGGI officials intercepted four trucks carrying illegal pan

masala consignments in Ahmedabad. A commercial tax officer posted in Kanpur says, "The investigation revealed that the 'Shikhar' pan masala consignment belonged to Trimurti Fragrances Private Ltd." Prasad alerted the GST officials in Kanpur. The DGGI Ahmedabad team reached Kanpur on December 22, met up with local officers and after the necessary permissions, raided the premises of Trimurti Fragrance Pvt Ltd, the makers of Shikhar Pan Masala. It was during this raid that the investigation team got information about Piyush Jain, who supplied the "essence" for the pan masala.

So is Kanpur becoming a black money haven? Deepak Tomar, a local lawyer who specialises in commercial tax cases, says, "There is a 28 per cent tax levied on pan masala, including central and

₹194.5

CRORE

Cash seized from the homes of Piyush Jain, an 'essence' maker for Kanpur's pan masala industry

₹15

LAKH

Income shown by Jain in his I-T returns for 2019-20



ANI

THE COUNTDOWN I-T officials had to use 17 counting machines to cope with the volumes of cash; (inset) Piyush Jain

market, say sources. Tomar explains, “Catechu, lime, clove, cardamom, along with spices and a chemical called ‘Gambier’, which is also used for cleaning leather, is used to make the compound. The special formula, of course, is known only to the makers.” Raw material for the compound is procured from Assam, West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh and Maharashtra. The illegal business and tax evasion begins with the process of sourcing raw materials. Tomar says, “The annual tax evasion in the pan masala and gutka business of Kanpur is more than Rs 1,000 crore. This is besides the money from illegal supplies to states where it is banned.”

So how does the gutka business avoid the tax man? Deputy commercial tax commissioner Vivekananda Kumar, who was posted in Kanpur for six years, says, “Most of these businessmen lead very simple, ‘invisible’ lifestyles. They keep the annual turnover of their companies low and pay their taxes on time. So they are never on the radar of the GST and I-T departments. But since their illegal business involves cash, they have to keep a lot of it hidden.”

Piyush Jain used to move around Kannauj town on a Bajaj Priya scooter or his Santro car. The registered annual turnover of his company, Odochem Industries, was Rs 7 crore for 2019-20. His I-T returns for the same year showed an income of Rs 15 lakh.

Meanwhile, with the election campaign in full swing, the main parties are using the raids to take potshots at each other. Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who reached Kanpur to inaugurate the metro on December 28, targeted Samajwadi Party president Akhilesh Yadav, alleging that he and his party were somehow involved. “The perfume of corruption that he had sprinkled all over UP before 2017 is now again in the air. But he is not coming forward to take credit,” Modi alleged.

The prime minister was taking aim, it seems, at SP Member of the Legislative Council (MLC) and perfumer Pushpraj ‘Pumpi’ Jain, 55, who is close to Akhilesh and lives about 200 metres away from Piyush Jain’s house on Jain Street in Kannauj. Pumpi is famous for launching a ‘Samajwadi perfume’ every year. Two months back, he had launched the ‘Samajwadi ittar’, made from the extract of 22 flowers, in Lucknow. The BJP is trying to make the case that the cash found at Piyush Jain’s house was meant for the SP leader to fund the party’s election campaign.

Pumpi, though, vehemently denies the allegation. “The BJP is spreading canards about me before the election. I have no business relations with Piyush,” he says. SP chief Akhilesh had called a press conference in Kannauj on December 31 to show solidarity to Pumpi but an hour before it was to start, I-T teams raided the latter’s houses, offices and factories in Surat, Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Kanpur, Kannauj and Lucknow. Pushpraj Jain is one of the big perfumers of Kannauj with business interests in the UK, US and Gulf countries. His firm, Pragati Aroma Oil Distillers Pvt Ltd, makes a perfume called ‘Rooh Gulab’, which is in great demand abroad. In 2016, he was elected MLC as an SP candidate.

IT officials claim they found evidence of fraudulent purchases and billing of more than Rs 20 crore and seized Rs 2 crore in cash in the raids. Akhilesh, though, is calling the raids a conspiracy to tar the name of Kannauj. Kannauj is also the parliamentary constituency of his wife and ex-MP Dimple Yadav. She lost to the BJP’s Subrata Pathak in the 2019 Lok Sabha election. Akhilesh says, “BJP leaders from Delhi to Lucknow are trying to defame Kannauj. They have trouble dealing with a perfume made in the name of the Samajwadi Party. Now there will be a perfume revolution. Change will happen in 2022.” Kannauj’s merchant class, though, will be hoping the revolution passes them by, ruffling as few feathers as possible. ■

state GST. Apart from this, the central government imposes a cess of 60 per cent on these products to discourage their use. The hefty taxes are at the root of the illegal businesses of pan masala, gutka and associated raw materials like chemical compounds. The chemical flavouring compound is manufactured in Kannauj.” Chemical compounds are used for flavouring in pan masala and gutka. The smell gives a unique identity to the pan masala and allegedly makes people addicted to it.

Piyush Jain and his brother Ambirish Jain are known as the ‘Compound Kings’ in Kannauj and Kanpur. Piyush’s father Mahesh Chandra Jain started the compound manufacturing business in Kannauj in 1997. Piyush, who has a Masters degree in Chemistry from Kanpur University, learned the formula from his father. His company, Odochem Industries, created a unique synthetic sandalwood oil extract, which in no time became the first choice of pan masala manufacturers. A litre of his synthetic oil goes for Rs 10 lakh in the



SELF-DETERMINED
National Conference
members protesting the
delimitation exercise on
January 1 in Srinagar

WASEEM ANDRABI/GETTY IMAGES

JAMMU & KASHMIR

DELIMITATION DISTRESS

By Moazum Mohammad

On New Year's Eve, Kashmir was a picture-perfect destination with peaks and meadows draped in snow and visitors crowding tourist destinations for night-long celebrations. But as morning arrived, Srinagar's Gupkar Road—home to three former chief ministers, along with government officials and the offices of security establishments—saw chaotic scenes, with barricades and security personnel blocking vehicular traffic toward the highly secured area. The move was aimed to scuttle the joint protest scheduled for later in the day

by the leaders of the PAGD (People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration)—Farooq Abdullah, his son Omar and Mehbooba Mufti—against the 'divisive' delimitation commission draft. Then, the inevitable: the three, along with PAGD spokesperson M.Y. Tarigami, were also put under house arrest.

On December 20 last year, the delimitation commission, led by retired Supreme Court judge Ranjana Prakash Desai, held a meeting in Delhi with its associate members, including five parliamentarians from J&K's NC (National Conference) and the BJP—Farooq Abdullah, retired Justice Hasnain

Masoodi, Mohammad Akbar Lone, Jitendra Singh and Jugal Kishore. At the meeting, the commission shared a draft paper with a district-wise allocation of seats developed on the basis of the 2011 census. Six new seats had been proposed for Jammu, and just one more for Kashmir. That accounted for the seven new seats announced for the state after the implementation of the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganisation Act, 2019. The total number of seats in the legislative assembly has now increased to 114—of course, 24 of those remain of purely nominal interest, pertaining as they do to Pakistan-occupied

Kashmir. More to the point, of the 90 seats now allocated to J&K, Jammu's share has gone up from 37 to 43, bringing it closer to Kashmir's tally, which is now just four more at 47.

Jammu's Kishtwar, Samba, Kathua, Rajouri, Doda and Reasi get an additional seat each, with a new one for Kashmir's Kupwara district. Instead of relying only on the population—usually the main criterion for delimitations—the commission has also considered geography, topography and proximity to the international border. In Jammu, each constituency has a population of about 125,000, while in Kashmir the figure is 145,000. The panel has also recommended reserving seven seats for scheduled castes and nine seats for scheduled tribes.

However, the exercise has not gone down well with locals, with simmering discontent even in Jammu, which some consider a BJP bastion. Choudhary Lal Singh, a Dogra leader and former BJP minister, says the delimitation exercise was wrong from the very beginning. Unimpressed by the six new seats for Jammu, the founder of the Dogra Swabhiman Sangathan, who has been raising emotive issues of Dogra identity, says Jammu should instead have 20 new seats. He cites the case of Kashmiri Pandits who are mainly based in Jammu, saying they should have seats there, also arguing that the 24 seats reserved for PoK should be distributed among those from Jammu.

Some argue the political furor over the draft delimitation plays into the BJP's hands, and that the saffron party is looking to delay assembly elections. J&K Panthers Party chairman Harshdev Singh says, "In the name of delimitation, they are delaying assembly elections. The BJP doesn't want a democratically elected government here and wants to continue ruling through proxies." The delimitation panel, the former minister suggests, should have given an equal number of seats to Jammu and Kashmir to settle "historical injustice".

Even senior members of the BJP are not entirely pleased with the commission's recommendations—former speaker of the legislative assembly and BJP leader Kavinder Gupta says that displaced residents from PoK who have settled in Jammu should be given reservations from the 24 seats reserved for PoK.

In Kashmir, people highlight the communal polarisation at the heart of the delimitation exercise. They point out that if population is the main criterion, Kashmir should have been given 51 seats—in this context, the granting of six new seats to Jammu and only one to Kashmir is being seen as an attempt to tilt the political power balance from Kashmir to Jammu. The BJP has a long-standing aspiration of seeing a Hindu chief minister in J&K, and the additional seats for Jammu are being seen as a step in this direc-

THE ALLOCATION OF SEATS HAS NOT GONE DOWN WELL, WITH RESENTMENT EVEN IN JAMMU, A BJP STRONGHOLD

tion. Masoodi sees this development as a next step in the disempowerment of Kashmir after the abrogation of Article 370 on August 5, 2019. The entire exercise, he says, is questionable and lacks constitutional validity since there are petitions challenging the August 5 move in the Supreme Court. "We told the commission that the delimitation exercise is illegal and the J&K Reorganisation Act is a constitutionally-suspect law," he says. "The panel had no answer and we were told to file an objection [to the commission]."

The objection prepared by the NC has listed several reasons to reject the exercise. For one, it questions delimitation being conducted in J&K when there is a broad freeze on such exercises

being conducted in the rest of India until 2026. It has also questioned the criteria on which the delimitation has been conducted, saying that population—usually the primary consideration for such an exercise—has been given lower importance in order to favour Jammu over Kashmir. It also cites the case of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, pointing out that after Telangana was created in 2014, the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Act increased the number of assembly seats in both states (from 119 to 153 in Telangana and 175 to 225 in Andhra Pradesh) without conducting a delimitation. Union Minister of State for Home Affairs Nityanand Rai said in Parliament on August 3 last year that the Centre would take up the delimitation in these states after 2026. "If elections can be held in Telangana without delimitation, the urgency to carve out new constituencies in J&K is transparent to all," says Masoodi.

Sunil Dimple, a political activist from Jammu, says his fears have come true after the delimitation commission's recommendations were made public, arguing it has nothing to offer to either Jammu or Kashmir. "We rejected the report outright," he says. Dimple boycotted the meeting of the commission during its four-day interaction with political parties, leaders, civil society groups and officials between July 4 and July 9 last year. He believes the exercise should have been conducted according to Census 2021 and that seats should have been distributed in parity to both regions. "*Yeh barbaadi ka raasta hai* (This is a route to destruction)," says Dimple, who heads Mission Statehood, an organisation working for the restoration of J&K's statehood. "What is the hurry to carry out this exercise?" The delimitation, he says, is a small issue and the larger problem is the demographic change coming from the government's new policy of leasing land to non-local investors. "Agricultural land is being allotted for commercial activities. They want to destroy our culture and identity. We welcome investors, but not at the cost of our demography." ■



Illustration by SIDDHANT JUMDE

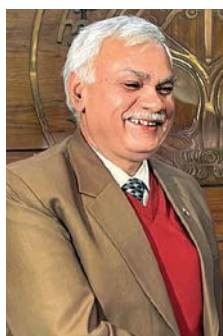
GLASSHOUSE

BRAHMIN QUOTA

BSP supremo Mayawati once called the Samajwadi Party a one-family party. But her party too is now witnessing the quiet political rise of a family in Uttar Pradesh. Not her own, but that of **Satish Mishra**, the party general secretary. Mishra has been holding public rallies to woo Brahmins while wife Kalpana has been reaching out to women voters and son Kapil Mishra has been conducting youth outreach meetings. Mishra's son-in-law, Paresch Mishra, handles the party war room while close relative Devi Prasad looks after party activities in Kanpur. An elite Brahmin vanguard for a Dalit party?

Under Watch

Gujarat cadre officer A.K. Sharma made news last year when he joined the BJP. He was nominated as MLC in the state legislature but wasn't included in Uttar Pradesh chief minister Yogi Adityanath's cabinet. Now, another new entrant from Delhi is turning the rumour mills. Union housing and urban affairs secretary **Durga Shankar Mishra** was due to retire on December 31 but was given a one-year extension and appointed UP chief secretary without, it is being said, Yogi's consent. Lucknow political circles believe his appointment is a sign the Centre will keep a closer eye on UP if the BJP returns to power.



NAND KUMAR

TWO BIRDS...

Telangana governor **Tamilisai Soundararajan** has held additional charge as Puducherry Lt governor since last year. She has now persuaded Union civil aviation minister Jyotiraditya Scindia to permit direct flights between the states that she refers to as her "twin babies". A direct flight will also shorten the governor's travel time between the two Raj Bhavans. A short commute is clearly a great motivator.



ANI

UPFRONT

ANI



ACTIVE DUTY

Kerala DGP **Anil Kant**, 60, is a fitness enthusiast and goes on a two-hour run daily, outpacing his juniors. This might be among the reasons why chief minister Pinarayi Vijayan chose him as DGP over other senior colleagues in June last year. Just days after he took over, the state police has been taking fire over two political murders in Alappuzha and the harassment of a Swedish tourist by a police officer. Kant has had to hit the ground running. Good thing he is in great shape.



ANI

Saying it with silver

Wax and clay statues of West Bengal chief minister **Mamata Banerjee** are passé. TMC district party leader Karim Khan has raised the bar with a silver bust of the CM. The bust, which took an artist over three months to make, weighs 6.5 kg, cost Rs 4.5 lakh and was a gift for the TMC's Birbhum district president Anubrata Mondal. A golden bust of the chief minister of 'Sonar Bangla' (Golden Bengal) cannot be far behind.



COVER STORY

FUTURE TRENDS 2022

HOPE SWINGS...

What a difference a month makes. At the start of November, 2021 seemed well on its way from the worst of times which it had showed us in April, to a holiday season of laughter and forgetting. Normalcy, or at least 'the new normal', seemed like the catchphrase for the coming new year. That and 'endemicity.' And then on November 26, we got something much catchier: Omicron.

The fourteen essays in our New Year special were always going to be an equation of hope and caution, but as you will see

they are all December's children: sober, if not sombre, their optimism a guarded memory. Our economists warn of bottlenecks and new challenges, our distinguished epidemiologist advises eternal vigilance and our geopolitical experts promise a world of uncertainties. Indian politics is a world unto itself, of course, one in which we can expect the current crisis to be trawled for electoral opportunities in the slew of state elections this year that could play out as a trailer to the main event in 2024. In truth, a few of our

writers seem less disheartened by the pandemic than most—with their eyes on the long term rise of the global Indian diaspora, or even welcoming the disruptions to our working routines that have hastened a new digital turn. Our climate change prognosticator does not invoke the Covid crisis at all but in her call for 'business as unusual' she does suggest that even if the pandemic has not really been 'good for the environment' it has given us pause to reconsider our priorities. Which is a hopeful, new year's thing to do...

Illustration by NILANJAN DAS



By
**RAJ
CHENGAPPA**

GOVERNANCE

FUTURE TRENDS 2022

A QUARTET OF CHALLENGES

**THE TRIALS THAT INDIA FACES IN 2022 REQUIRE AT THE HELM MODI
THE STATESMAN RATHER THAN THE POLITICIAN**

The start of 2022 finds Prime Minister Narendra Modi facing a quartet of challenges that will test his leadership skills and his governance to the extreme: tackling the third wave of Covid, leading his party to victory in the upcoming five assembly polls, reviving the country's flailing economy and dealing with an aggressive China. As he hunkers down for the fight, the prime minister must feel like the Indian juggler that the 19th century English essayist William Hazlitt described in an article: "To catch four balls in succession in less than a second of time, and deliver them back so as to return with seeming consciousness to the hand again, to make them revolve round him at certain intervals, like the planets in their spheres, to do what appears an impossibility... a single error of a hair's breadth, of the smallest conceivable portion of time, could be fatal."

Each of the four challenges that Modi confronts are intrinsically linked, requiring the dexterity, coordination, reflexes, spatial awareness, strategic thinking and concentration of a juggler to tackle them. Take the rapid spread of the Omicron variant of Covid-19. It struck just when India was chuffed by the progress of its massive

vaccination drive and had seemingly put the nightmare of the second wave in 2021 behind it. Some experts term Omicron the 'vaccine of vaccines'—a milder, yet vastly more contagious affliction that could make it an ideal instrument for global herd immunity. But it would be a folly to be complacent as the sheer caseload could overwhelm the health infrastructure. Taking cognisance of the fresh threat, Modi has rolled out vaccination for the 74 million young Indians aged between 15 and 18—plus, the fully vaccinated population above age 65 but with co-morbidities would be eligible for a booster dose too. The Modi government must now ensure that the states take measures to slow down infection rates and are well-equipped with adequate beds, drugs and oxygen for treatment. Meanwhile, several potential vaccines for even younger children need to be put on the fast track to cover most of the country's population.

Handling Omicron will determine how well the prime minister is able to juggle the other three balls. In politics, it's a no brainer that Uttar Pradesh is the prize. For Modi and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), winning the state with a convincing majority is key to building up the momentum for a third term and his ability to boldly govern India in the latter half of his second term. Modi's



track record in helping his party win assembly elections after 2017 hasn't been good. Barring the win in Assam in mid-2021 and a qualified one in Bihar the year before, the losses in Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and more recently in West Bengal, Tamil Nadu and Kerala point to dwindling returns from the BJP's iconic trump card. Retaining Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, Goa and Manipur is imperative for the BJP, as is preventing Congress from regaining power in Punjab, to thwart its revival.

Modi has many other tough calls to make on the political front. Massive political rallies in the states going to polls will lead to an explosion of Covid cases. As prime minister, his campaigning for the BJP must set a model for caution and circumspection for others to follow. Also, as the defeat in the 2021 West Bengal polls proved, pushing for polarisation of votes to win UP at any cost could have deleterious consequences for the party and its prime campaigner. Hindutva's extreme fringe is already baring its fangs as seen by the incendiary speeches against minorities at the *dharam sansad* in Uttarakhand recently. A campaign that exacerbates existing schisms between communities could not only adversely impact the outcome of elections in Punjab, but create lingering faultlines. A fractured Punjab is something India can ill afford with Pakistan, emboldened by its success in Afghanistan, waiting for an opportunity to revive extremist elements in this frontline state. A similar warning holds good for Jammu and Kashmir, where the Modi government had abrogated Article 370 and reduced the state to a Union territory in 2019. Assembly elections must be held in 2022 to end the feeling of alienation in the Valley, apart from regaining the moral high ground internationally.

Yet, even as the prime minister wages political battles, he is aware that the revival of the economy in the latter half of 2021 is coming undone. Rising inflation and unemployment, mainly in the informal sector, are spectres that will flash more ominously in the grey light cast by Omicron. Particularly im-

pacted would be those who lost their jobs when small and micro enterprises had to shut shop during previous Covid waves. Meanwhile, with Modi backing down on the agriculture laws, the government may find it difficult to speed up the reform process across sectors. For instance, taking a cue from the farmers' agitation, labour unions may be emboldened to take to the streets to protest the implementation of the new labour laws.

Rapid economic growth must remain the Modi government's prime focus in 2022 to provide jobs and boost the revenues needed to fund welfare and infrastructure schemes. But, as a senior finance ministry official put it, "there are

THIS IS THE YEAR MODI SHOULD REACH OUT TO THE OPPOSITION, BEGIN A DIALOGUE FOR UNITY TO MEET THE EXTRAORDINARY CHALLENGES THAT 2022 POSES

no easy solutions". To revive small and micro enterprises, apart from financial support, experts say there is scope for further rationalisation of the current Goods and Sales Tax (GST) into three slabs rather than four and raising the turnover threshold to exempt even more small businesses. That would simplify the process, enhance compliance and lessen evasion. In the interim, the central government may have to come up with a safety net for unemployed urban workers. One way could be an urban employment scheme on the lines of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA).

While maintaining the glide path on the fiscal deficit that it promised in the 2021 budget, the Modi government must not let up on its capital expenditure

on infrastructure. Privatisation of public sector banks and PSUs must proceed for the government to avoid a cash crunch. It is also vital that much of the capital investment comes from the private sector which has shown the appetite to expand after the economy rebounded last year. The Production Linked Incentive Schemes in 13 key sectors should help. Regulatory red tape should also be cut for the sectors that were opened recently like mining, space and defence.

The fourth ball that Modi must skilfully juggle with in 2022 is foreign policy, particularly with regard to the threat and opportunities that an aggressive China poses. India and the US see common cause in containing China, cementing the Quad process along with Australia and Japan in 2021. But India is the only one among them that shares an unsettled border with China and, in 2022, the Modi government must evolve strategies and tactics to deter Beijing from any further military adventurism. The return of the Taliban in Kabul, which lent strategic depth to the existing China-Pakistan nexus, poses its own set of challenges—terror not the least of them. On the other hand, the growing stand-off between China and the West holds economic opportunities for India to become part of an alternative supply chain network and boost exports. This requires India to re-examine its resistance to major trade pacts.

Most of all, the clutch of challenges, both domestic and international, that the country faces in 2022, require Modi the Statesman at the helm rather than the Politician. There is an acute need to lower the political temperatures—whether the hyper nationalism and polarisation practiced by the ruling party or the obduracy and negativity of the Opposition—that is adversely impacting the country's progress. This is the year that Modi should reach out to the Opposition and begin a dialogue for unity to meet the extraordinary challenges that 2022 poses. To quote Hazlitt again: "Greatness is great power producing great effects." Modi still has great power. He must wield it wisely and for the greater good in 2022. ■



देश का नं. 1 हिंदी न्यूज़ ऐप

जुड़े रहिए हर खबर से,
कहीं भी, कभी भी

अभी डाउनलोड करें

aajtak.in/app

उपलब्ध है





By
**GAGANDEEP
KANG**

COVID-19

WILL 2022 BRING RELIEF FROM COVID?

OMICRON SHOWED US THAT NEW MUTANT COVID STRAINS ARE STILL EMERGING. SCIENCE AND PUBLIC HEALTH NEED TO BE AT THE FOREFRONT OF OUR CONTROL EFFORTS, SUPPORTED BY ENABLING POLICY IF WE ARE TO BEAT THE VIRUS

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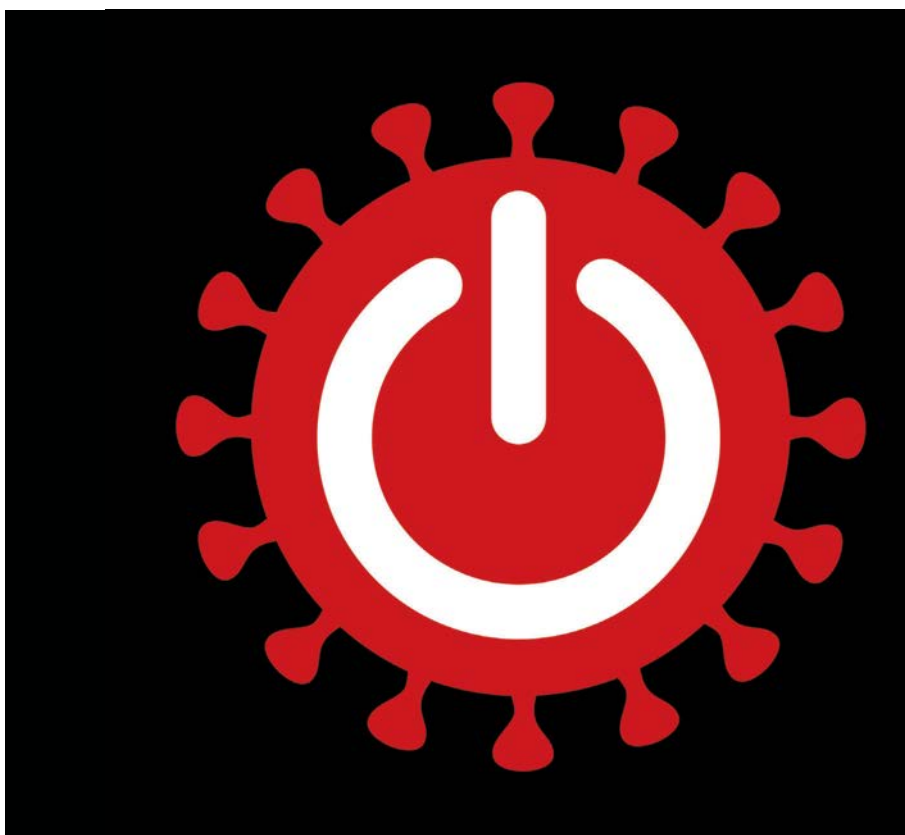
The year 2021 started in an exhilarating manner—with the promise of vaccines and lowering cases in India, against a background threat of what was called the UK variant at the time (now known as alpha), for which flights from the UK were temporarily halted. India's vaccine story was progressing, even though it was already clear that the rosy projections of timelines and number of doses made by the leading manufacturers were not being met. This reflected later in the year with the slow increase in vaccination and the struggles to obtain doses in the first half of 2021, even though after an initial sharing of doses as purchases and donations, India shut down vaccine exports to serve its own needs as cases increased through the

latter half of February and then exploded in the next two months.

In hindsight, it all seems obvious. A new variant, slow vaccination and mass gatherings which included local and long distance travel created the perfect storm to overwhelm the less than robust healthcare systems, particularly in northern India. The desperation to use anything and everything flying in the face of any form of evidence-based medicine created India's second epidemic of the 'black fungus', unique to India

and a reminder that over-treatment comes with consequences. People died, with numbers still disputed, but likely to be underestimated in many states. Families who were already reeling with economic losses and social disruptions, struggled to find hospital beds and help. By the beginning of June, we were in a better place, with declining cases and an irrational decision on vaccine supply reversed. But for the rest of the world, their delta story was just beginning.

The pattern for how the SARS-CoV2



pandemic would be handled was established in 2020. Rich countries poured resources into the development and testing of vaccines if they had the ability to make them, and if they did not, they began reserving doses of as yet unproven vaccines. Their bets paid off. It turned out that new and old platforms worked well, and vaccines were easy to develop

IN 2022, WE MUST REDOUBLE EFFORTS TO STRENGTHEN MANUFACTURE AND DELIVERY SYSTEMS OF VACCINES... IF WE DO NOT REDUCE VIRAL CIRCULATION GLOBALLY, WE DO NOT DECREASE THE RISK OF NEW VARIANTS EMERGING

(if not to make) and depending on the platform, worked brilliantly or well. The world's vaccination programme, which had never made more than 4 billion doses of vaccine in any year, made 10 billion doses of SARS-CoV2 vaccines in 2021, and gave at least 9 billion doses. More than half the world's population received at least one dose of a vaccine.

But there was a terrible chasm between the haves and the have-nots, whether it was with diagnostic tests, se-

quencing, or vaccines and vaccination. Rich countries began booster doses and vaccinating children before the rest of the world, particularly Africa, received doses to protect their most vulnerable, estimated by the WHO at 20 per cent of the population. In low-income countries, less than 10 per cent of people have received their first dose of vaccine. The COVAX facility, despite advance purchases, was pushed to the back of the queue by more powerful political drivers and failed to meet its 2021 goal of delivering 2 billion doses of vaccine. But there is at least hope now, as the scaled up manufacturing and declining demand from high income countries makes more doses accessible. In 2022, we will have to redouble efforts to strengthen manufacturing and delivery systems to ensure that as much of the world's population is protected as quickly as possible, because of the threat that if we do not reduce viral circulation globally, we do not decrease the risk of new variants emerging.

In a repeat of the experience with alpha in early 2021, we face a new threat in the highly mutated Omicron variant. Omicron's sequence data tell us that we do not yet understand why and how, and perhaps more importantly where and in whom, viruses evolve. This is a highly transmissible virus and it is likely it will outcompete delta to become the dominant strain globally. Omicron may be less severe than previous variants, but it also includes multiple mutations that make it less susceptible to the immune response elicited by prior infection or our current vaccines, making it urgent and essential that we understand the consequences in populations that have received different kinds of vaccines and have different infection histories. Governments have introduced travel bans, curfews and booster doses in attempts to handle this new and unpredictable threat. But it is important to understand that we are in a different place this year than we were at the end of 2020. We know more and have more, in terms of understanding viral behavior and how to use diagnostic tests, drugs and vaccines. Unfortunately, the

science of infectious disease epidemiology and public health has been sidelined, even in the medical profession in some places, by inaccurate opinion-driven pronouncement and by political drivers of action.

Without downplaying the work that still remains to be done, or the ways in which we failed and the need to grieve the tremendous losses suffered by many, what has been accomplished in the last two years is nothing short of extraordinary in scale. It can be argued that the mobilisation of science and technology allowed us to understand, track, treat and prevent infections from our viral foe, which while less deadly than other coronaviruses, shows us the shape of things to come in a world where man-made change is creating the potential for an increase in new pandemics. In large measure, we share the blame for the conditions in which pandemics arise, but the huge and historic effort of 2021 shows what our collaborative, collective intellectual resources can achieve.

What do we need? We need to understand that the future Omicron portends is one in which new SARS-CoV2 variants will continue to emerge and some will have evolved sufficiently away from the immune system that we will have new global waves, much like we already experience with influenza. This means that both science and public health need to be at the forefront of our control endeavours, supported by enabling policy. We need the scientific research to tell us which control measures work and which do not, how should testing strategy be used to best protect the vulnerable, what the enablers of community behavior change are, the best clinical protocols for each stage of illness, how to make and test new broadly protective vaccines that do not require a booster every few months, and we need the enabling policy that strategically funds the science at scale and for the long term. These threats are not going away. ■

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By
**PAVAN K.
VARMA**

HINDUISM VS HINDUTVA

FUTURE TRENDS 2022

THE FIGHT FOR HINDU VALUES

HINDUISM'S GRAND, COMPLEX AND CEREBRAL LEGACY HAS BEEN REDUCED TO ITS LOWEST COMMON DENOMINATOR BY HINDUTVA FANATICS. REAL HINDUS MUST STAND UP, FIGHT THIS DIVIDE

P

erhaps nothing better sums up the conquering eclecticism of Hinduism than these lines from the 'Nasadiya Sukta' in the Rig Veda, the first recorded rumination in Hindu philosophy on the origins of the universe: 'Who really knows? Who will here proclaim it? Whence was it produced? Whence this creation? The gods came afterwards with the creation of this universe? Who then knows whence it has risen?'

This hymn is remarkable for its absence of dogma; there are no certitudes; no injunction for obeisance; no religious commands or call to ritual. There is awe, there is wonderment,

but, above all, there is inquiry, an emphasis on the need to ask, to probe, to go beyond conventional categories of thought to the realm of speculation, an invitation to ideation.

This self-assured non-prescriptive nature of Hinduism was proclaimed by our founding seers. *Ekam sat bipraha bahudha vadhanti* (The truth is one, wise people, call it by different names) has been the key to Hinduism's tensile strength. *Anno bhadraha kritvo yantu vishvataha* (Let good thoughts flow to me from all directions) was its clarion call for openness to thought. *Udar charitanam vasudhaiva kutumbukam* (For the big hearted the entire world is a family) was its motto for an inclusiveness of spirit. That is why Hindu philosophy had not one but six systems of thought, each focused less on conventional divinity and more on what the ultimate truth could be behind the bewildering plurality of the cosmos. Not surprisingly, even the Charvakas, whose materialism compelled them to call the Vedas a lie, were a part of Hinduism. As Mahatma Gandhi wrote: 'If I know Hinduism at all, it is essentially inclusive and ever growing, ever responsive. It gives the freest scope to imagination, speculation and reason.'

Hindutva seeks to convert such a *sanatana dharma* to a Wahhabi style faith, thereby posing a threat to the very essence of Hinduism. Hindutva fanatics have reduced Hinduism's grand, nuanced and complex cerebral legacy to its lowest common denominator. Masquerading as the self-anointed protectors of Hinduism, they are the stormtroopers of the BJP-RSS. What are their distinguishing

**MASQUERADING AS THE SELF-ANOINTED
PROTECTORS OF THE FAITH, THE HINDUTVA FANATICS
ARE THE STORMTROOPERS OF THE BJP-RSS**



features? First, their knowledge of Hinduism is simplistic, highly superficial and ritualistic. Second—and for precisely this reason—they are averse to dialogue, discussion and debate. Third, they have no compunction in resorting to violence to impose their views. Fourth, they are highly conservative and orthodox and supportive of the inequitable existing hierarchies in society. Fifth, they are deeply patriarchal, believing that women should accept their subordinate position and conform to stereotypical notions of

this buttresses their preconceived world view.

If these are the features of the practitioners of Hindutva, what can we expect them to do in the future? We must accept that with several state assembly elections on the anvil, and the national elections due in 2024, the BJP's electoral strategy will be to further religious polarisation, and accentuate Hindu-Muslim divide. For this, it will use a policy of both explicit encouragement to Hindu vigilante groups, and expedient denial, thereby hoping to reap

Namaaz sites, already targeted in Gurgaon by Hindu vigilante groups in spite of administrative approvals, will come under further attack. Arbitrary injunctions for mandatory vegetarianism could proliferate, even if most Hindus eat meat. Claims will become louder that the Muslims are multiplying uncontrollably—when all official data points to the contrary. The recent attack on a church in Roorkee could become the template for more such hooliganism. Social media will be whipped up to target minorities and all those who refuse to accept this narrow, bigoted and exclusionist interpretation of Hinduism. Hyper patriotism will become an accessory to religious evangelism. Above all, there would be the pervasive and real threat of the use of force by organised lumpen elements against anyone not genuflecting before their writ. What is worse, law enforcing agencies will do very little, especially in BJP-ruled states, and—as Narottam Mishra, home minister of BJP-ruled Madhya Pradesh did in the case of the *Ashram* attack—statements will be made condoning such lawlessness.

For millennia, Hinduism has survived because it accommodates diversities and has the inherent ability for *shastrartha* or civilised discourse. Our foundational texts, the Upanishads, the Bhagwat Gita, the Brahman Sutras, are all dialogues. The eclecticism and inclusiveness of Hinduism is not its weakness but its strength. Hindutva, as the political arm of the BJP-RSS, wants to convert this remarkable faith to a series of ignorant, illiterate and distorted fiats. It is a danger that all real Hindus should face up to and defeat. ■

THE BJP'S POLL STRATEGY WILL BE TO FURTHER RELIGIOUS POLARISATION, A POLICY OF BOTH EXPLICIT ENCOURAGEMENT TO HINDU VIGILANTE GROUPS, AND EXPEDIENT DENIAL...

so-called 'Hindu' values. Sixth, their dominant emotion is hatred of the 'other', others being defined as primarily Muslim, but also including all those who are not part of their smug circle of like-minded largely upper-caste brethren. Seventh, they want to glorify India's Hindu past, but their knowledge is farcical, consisting of a make-believe world of airplanes and cars, thereby devaluing the real achievements and refinements of ancient India. Eighth, they have scant regard for the rule of law, especially since they believe that they have the backing of the powers that be. Ninth, they have little problem in conflating religion with patriotism; only their type of Hindu can be patriotic, while the patriotism of all others is suspect. And tenth, they are particularly porous to false information as long as

political dividends while simultaneously distancing itself from the more lawless and outrageous actions.

We could, therefore, expect to see in 2022, the mosque in Mathura to come under attack, notwithstanding explicit legal provisions against such actions. A conjured siege mentality will be hyper ventilated through hate speeches, and 'hurt religious sentiments' will be the stick. There will be attacks against perceived derogations of Hindu dharma, as for instance witnessed in the brazenly illegal vandalism of the shooting of the web series, *Ashram*. Stand-up comedians, who dare to speak truth to power, will continue to be pilloried. Women will be targeted for what they wear, who they meet, what they drink and eat and what kind of relationship they can have.

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By **RAM
MADHAV**

HINDUTVA

THE BALANCE BETWEEN PRIDE AND ANGER

THE CORE MISSION OF THE RSS, RE-ESTABLISHING THE CENTRALITY OF HINDU CULTURAL AND CIVILISATIONAL IDENTITY IN INDIA'S NATIONAL LIFE, HAS BECOME A REALITY. IN 2022, THE SANGH NEEDS TO CORRECT THE MISCONCEPTIONS ARISING OUT OF IT

O

On New Year's day, sarsanghchalak of the RSS (Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh) Mohan Bhagwat addressed a gathering of eminent citizens in Bengaluru. He was there not to talk about a Hindu Rashtra or Hindu-Muslim relations, but about *paryavaran*—the environment. Long considered an NGO domain, the RSS is now looking at it as an area of interest. A new wing, Paryavaran Gatividhi (climate activism), was added to the roster of the RSS recently.

And it's not just the environment, RSS-inspired activism can now be found in many other areas, including healthcare, education and social welfare. 'Saksham' is an NGO that works among the disabled, whom the RSS had christened 'Divyang' much before the government started using that term. During the crisis months of the Covid pandemic, the RSS quietly organised extensive training programs for over 100,000 village health volunteers across the country who were given ba-



sic training by doctors to tackle emergencies in the event of a future Covid wave. From running primary and secondary institutions, RSS members are now venturing into setting up universities and institutions of excellence.

Coupled with this 'NGO style' activism is a focused effort to correct the image and perception of the Sangh. In the last decade or so, the RSS has quietly increased its outreach through a new activity, 'Vishesh Sampark', a reaching out to specific target groups. All senior functionaries including Bhagwat take time out to meet 'influencers' in society to explain the RSS cause. The RSS chief has reached out to leaders of Muslim, Christian and other communities, exhorting them to overcome prejudices and learn more about the RSS. Extending this further, the RSS has embarked on the task of reaching out to political, aca-

in India's post-independence decades was centred around secularism. Hindu, Hindutva and Hinduism were relegated to the fringes and dubbed communal. Hindu Mahasabha leader N.B. Khare's description of Jawaharlal Nehru as a "Hindu by accident" came to be identified with the mainstream polity all these years. A false notion of secularism equated with the rejection of Hindu identity as majoritarianism—and yet pandering to minorityism in the same breath—had become the dominant political discourse after independence.

That distorted notion of secularism, dubbed by many Hindutva protagonists as pseudo-secularism, has now been rejected by the majority of Indians. To call oneself a Hindu is no longer a matter of hesitation or shame. Even prominent Congress leaders are writing books about Hindu history and civilisation. The RSS

RSS cadre had reached out and secured support from over 130 million Indians, including people from all parties, social groups and even members of other religions like the Muslims and Christians. No other social organisation can claim such an expansive reach and connect with the ordinary masses.

As it nears its centenary and embarks on a course befitting its strength as well as the need of the changing times, the organisation is faced with some critical challenges. Although it has emerged as the fulcrum of Hindu civilisational reassertion, it is still subject to scrutiny and criticism. Its exponential growth has resulted not only in organisational spread but also in influence of its thought process, the latter many times higher than the former. In fact, the RSS outside the shakhas is much larger than inside it. And it is not necessary that the discipline found inside can be found outside too.

This puts greater onus on the RSS leadership. Mohan Bhagwat understands it. He faced sharp criticism from a section when he talked about 'the common DNA of all Indians' sometime ago. His original emphasis was on telling the Muslims that they were not alien to the cultural-civilisational life of this ancient nation. But when he reiterated recently that "the DNA of all the people of India from 40,000 years ago is the same as that of the people today", it was probably his response to those angry sections, and also a likely theme for the organisation in coming years.

There is widespread Hindu pride in India today, not necessarily against any other community or religion. There is also Hindu anger among some sections—a sense of persecution, genuine or otherwise—triggered by acts like proselytising and Islamic radicalism. While pursuing its centenarian agenda, the challenge for the RSS will be to find a balance between the pride and anger, ensuring that neither spills over. ■

Ram Madhav is Member, RSS National Executive. He is also Member, Board of Governors, India Foundation

THAT DISTORTED NOTION OF SECULARISM, DUBBED PSEUDO-SECULARISM BY HINDUTVA PROTAGONISTS, HAS BEEN REJECTED BY THE MAJORITY OF INDIANS

demic, intellectual, religious and social leaders in dozens of countries in an effort to address the disinformation challenge affecting its image makeover globally.

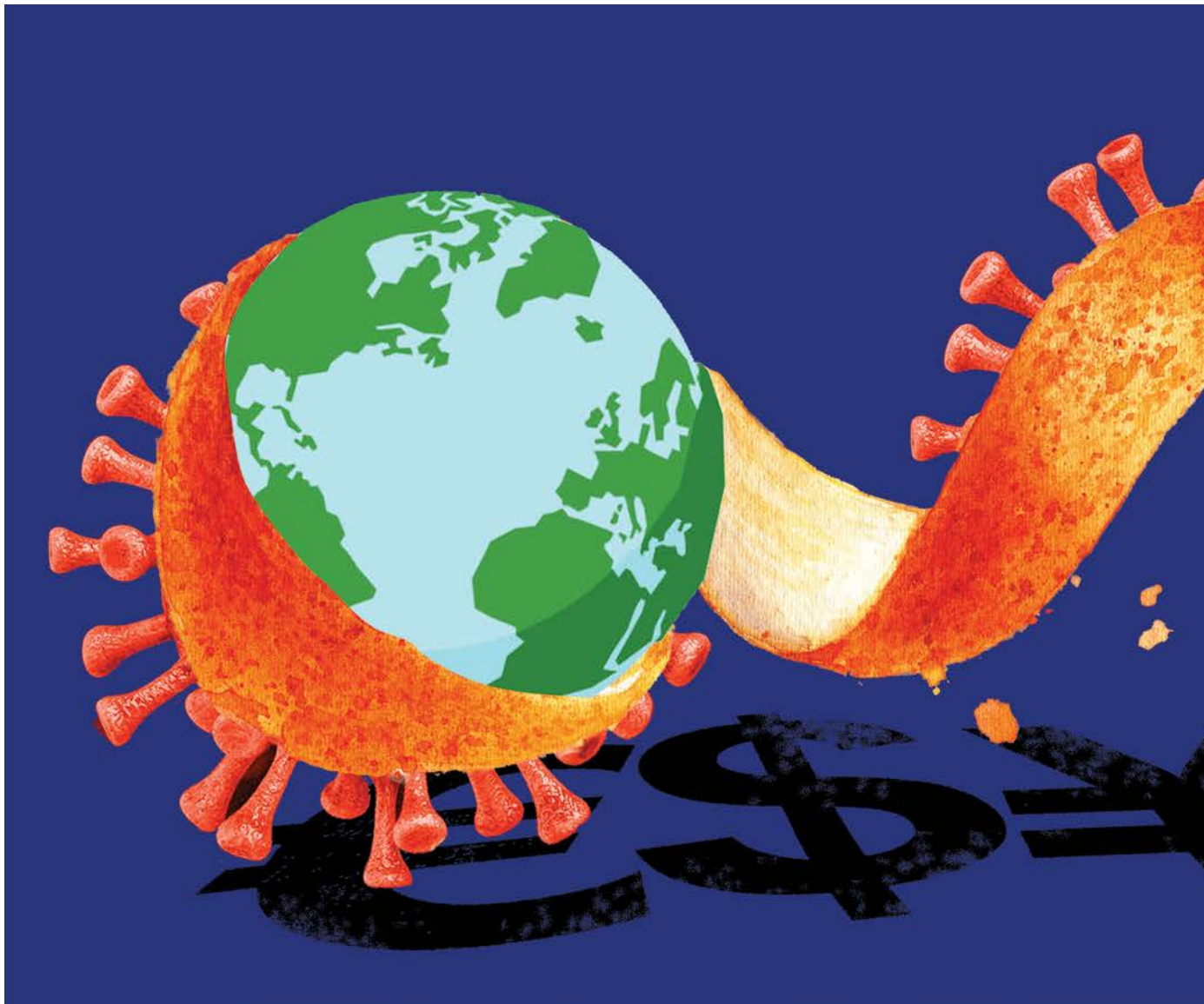
A new confidence is conspicuous in the once reticent organisation these days. This stems from the fact that the core mission that it has pursued for over a century—re-establishing the centrality of Hindu cultural and civilisational identity in India's national life—has now become a reality. Hindutva occupies national centrestage today. Senior Congress leader Rahul Gandhi wants to call himself a Hindu; so does Mamata Banerjee, leader of the Trinamool Congress. Delhi chief minister Arvind Kejriwal has made budget allocations to give senior citizens free pilgrimage rides to Ayodhya.

All this was inconceivable a decade ago. The dominant political discourse

must get credit for this.

Every movement passes through four stages, as the saying goes, "First they ignore you, then they laugh at you. Then they attack you, then you win." Many movements lose steam during the first three stages. The RSS has successfully passed through all of them and emerged as part of the national mainstream, overcoming ridicule and rejection. Not many organisations have survived for a century. The RSS has not only survived but it has thrived.

Today, it has more than 50,000 *shakhas*, and RSS activity spawns across lakhs of villages in the country. One barometer for assessing its spread and influence could be the recent campaign for mobilising financial support for the Ram Janmabhoomi temple in Ayodhya. Started earlier this year, thousands of



By
**JAHANGIR
AZIZ**

GLOBAL ECONOMY

FUTURE TRENDS 2022

THE TIMES ARE A-CHANGIN'...

THOUGH STRONG,
THE GLOBAL
RECOVERY
REMAINS UNEVEN
AND INCOMPLETE,
AND 2022 BRINGS
MANY NEW
CHALLENGES



Illustration by NILANJAN DAS

IN 2021, THE GLOBAL ECONOMY IS LIKELY TO HAVE GROWN ABOUT 5.8 PER CENT, UP FROM THE -3.3 PER CENT REGISTERED IN 2020

2022, we expect an above-trend growth rate of 4.3 per cent. But the recovery will remain uneven and incomplete. Developed economies have recovered more strongly than emerging and developing economies, where the recovery will remain incomplete compared to the pre-pandemic path even by end-2022. This should not be surprising. The pandemic was primarily a public-health crisis that required strong fiscal support to mitigate the economic fallout. Developed economies have much better public-health ecosystems and more fiscal space than others. These differences are showing up in the uneven pace and completeness of the recovery.

As the recovery broadens, the extraordinary policy support is also nearing its end. Monetary and fiscal policies are normalizing, albeit at different paces across economies depending on their respective excess capacities and the inflationary pressures they face. We expect the inflationary pressures to ebb as supply-chains normalize but settle at a higher level than before the pandemic. As policies normalize, it is natural to ask whether economies can be resilient to the normalization. Barring a handful, most economies, such as the US, will pass the test as the withdrawal is likely to be gradual and private sector balance sheets are much stronger than in 2016-18. But not all economies will be unscathed. Brazil and Chile are already being challenged by the withdrawal of policy support, and it is likely that others, like India, where fiscal support has been less than desired, could see extensive damage to household and SME balance sheets that can become a significant headwind.

As we navigate the twists and turns of this strong but uneven recovery and the pandemic

It's now been nearly two years since the pandemic began, and we are still not out of the woods. The Omicron variant is still spreading and the Delta wave is not yet over. But this is not 2020. Unlike then, we today have several vaccines and at least two therapeutic drugs in production and others in the pipeline. While vaccination rates differ widely across the world, the days of lockdowns and other extreme forms of social distancing are likely behind us. As such, we expect the strong global economic recovery underway to continue, perhaps with a few stumbles.

In 2021, the global economy is likely to have grown around 5.8 per cent, up from the -3.3 per cent registered in 2020. For

uncertainties, here are five broad developments to look out for.

COVID-19 TURNS ENDEMIC

While it might be hard to see this with Delta still potent and Omicron spreading, but along with the vaccinations, therapeutics and better medical management, the pandemic is turning endemic. Variants of the virus in less deadly form will likely remain with us. Vaccinations, along with more cautious social interactions, will become the norm. In terms of the economic impact, this will mean higher health spending and—in the same manner that influenza already imposes a productivity cost—the work week of labor and capital will be shortened as absenteeism rises and labor participation declines. All this will take some fraction off the level of GDP globally but will not affect its growth rate.

COP26 COMMITMENTS

The COP26 commitments to reach carbon neutrality are likely to impact not just future energy sources but also commodity prices. The path to carbon neutrality is unlikely to be a smooth glide, especially when every country pulls back on fossil fuel consumption at the same time without adequate alternatives. This year we have already seen natural gas prices surge in Europe as fossil fuel energy sources were cut back without stable alternatives in place. Similarly, China's decarbonisation efforts disrupted global commodity prices. The massive global efforts to find stable and more efficient green energy sources will be successful over time. In the interim, global commodity markets are likely to become more volatile with increasingly shorter cycles.

CHINA'S REGIME CHANGE

Although we expect China to rebound from the growth slow-down in 2021, a policy regime change is underway. Two aspects of this change are important. First, the shift from

a growth-dominated target to a multiple-objectives framework means a greater tolerance for lower medium-term growth. While policies geared to fuel innovation and support high-value-added industries (green tech, biotech, computing) should support growth, other policies are likely to dampen near-term growth in the hopes of longer-term gains (financial deleveraging, decarbonisation, and a reduction in regional and income equality). Second, in the past, housing and industrial policies were moved counter-cyclically along with macroeconomic policies to strengthen the latter's effective-

leave behind permanent damage to emerging and developing economies' medium-term growth with substantial scarring to labor markets, household, and SME balance sheets. While there are some evocative stories about why productivity is entering a new golden era, including leapfrogging by digitisation, our estimates of the drivers of productivity growth in these economies point to a continuation of subdued trends in productivity. The slowdown in China's medium-term growth will also add to the pre-existing drags, such as aging populations, economic nationalism and trade protectionism.

WITH VACCINATIONS, THERAPEUTICS AND BETTER MEDICAL MANAGEMENT THE PANDEMIC IS TURNING ENDEMIC

ness and reduce their transmission lags. With industrial and housing policies now firmly focused on long-term rather than cyclical objectives, the impact of macroeconomic policy changes has weakened, while their transmission lags have lengthened. It is likely that policies need to be recalibrated to be as effective as before. This is a learning process and could take time, which increases the risk of the authorities providing less-than-adequate policy support. The structural slowdown and the changes in China's growth engines also mean that economies linked to China will feel the impact. Both commodity and traditional manufacturing exporters to China will face the brunt of this change, while high-end manufacturing exporters are likely to gain.

PERMANENT COVID DAMAGE

In contrast to developed economies, we anticipate that the pandemic will

COMING ELECTORAL CYCLES

Emerging market economies have been lucky that the pandemic and its aftermath did not coincide with major electoral changes. But in the coming 2-3 years, these economies will all face elections. From the few elections that have taken place in the shadow of the pandemic (mostly in Latin America), there has already been a decisive shift towards populism. The shift has already dented fiscal discipline and unnerved markets. The low growth of the pre-pandemic years and the likely damage to household (especially to the lower and middle-income classes) and SME balance sheets were significant factors in the political shift in Latin America. Other emerging market countries will also be tested as they go into elections. ■

Jahangir Aziz is Chief Emerging Markets Economist, J.P. Morgan



By
**NEELKANTH
MISHRA**

INDIAN ECONOMY

FUTURE TRENDS 2022

MORE SUPPLY, LOW DEMAND

**WITH VACCINATION NUMBERS RISING,
SUPPLY CHAIN BOTTLENECKS ARE LIKELY
TO EASE, IMPROVING OUTPUT. THE
CHALLENGE IN 2022 WILL BE TO KEEP
DEMAND HIGH TO ALLOW INDIA TO RETURN
TO THE PRE-PANDEMIC GROWTH PATH**

T

he waves of the Covid-19 pandemic, which triggered a global economic recession in 2020, have continued even as 2021 ends. The Delta variant continues to cause much destruction of life, and has forced nearly every country to accept that Covid-19 may never go away. We should know in a few weeks how severe infections from the new Omicron variant can be, and how long the wave lasts (early evidence gives some cause for cautious optimism), but the threat of yet newer variants lurks on the horizon. Irrespective of these challenges, it looks like 2022 could be a very different

year for the global economy than 2021.

As restrictions on activity eased in 2021, consumer demand rebounded. The boost from fiscal transfers, particularly in the US, was so strong that shortages emerged in everything from port capacity and ships to cell-phones, toys, shoes and equipment. Continuing production disruptions, as fragmented supply chains struggled with the lack of small but critical components like semiconductors, clogged shipping routes, and sporadic break-outs of infections in manufacturing locations exacerbated the shortages. This prompted hoarding by consumers as well as supply-chain intermediaries, further worsening the apparent demand-supply gap and pushing up prices. Towards the end of the year energy prices rose, as global demand recovered, but suppliers of coal, gas and oil, which had mothballed production capacity due to nearly two years of depressed demand, had not yet restarted operations in full swing. In the US, large cash handouts to households also tightened the labour market more than the level of output would warrant, which was likely an important factor in inflation reaching multi-decade highs.

Global output should see continued recovery in 2022, relieving some inflation pressures: for instance, im-

**IN 2022, THE
QUESTION FOR
INDIA IS THIS:
HOW CLOSE CAN
WE GET TO THE
PRE-PANDEMIC
GROWTH PATH?**

proving vaccination levels helps factories operate without disruptions, keeps hubs like Vietnam re-open and allows steady supplies of key inputs like metals and semiconductors to be maintained, replenishing inventories and restarting production chains. Some risks remain, though. A broad-based lockdown in China could disrupt supply chains (among major economies, only China is still targeting “zero-Covid”). Further, geopolitics clouds supply normalisation in oil and gas, and is a risk to be wary of.

On the other hand, as we enter 2022, in contrast to 2021, the world faces slowing demand. Global retail sales have fallen back to trend, and as pent-up demand fades further, effects of the significant US fiscal stimulus weaken, Chinese retail sales remain more than 10 per cent below trend, and surging infections force many European nations to restrict activities again, they are likely to fall below trend in the next few months. The services-to-goods switch that occurred during lockdowns (as services were restricted) should also reverse, hurting goods demand. Further, fixed-assets investment has been weak globally, partly due to uncertainty from repeated pandemic outbreaks, but also because of changes in Chinese policy towards its real estate market and local infrastructure. There has been some easing in December, but the objective appears to be to engineer a soft landing rather than accelerate these activities again.

This slowdown in demand may not be easy to counter. As inflation makes headlines in the developed world and has risen in some developing economies too, governments are facing political pressure (particularly in the US), and policymakers are unlikely to be in a position to respond to slower growth with more stimulus. In fact, nearly all central banks are now withdrawing monetary accommodation and some have also embarked on monetary tightening. While lower demand and improved supplies should help bring down inflation, this may take several months, and

perhaps longer in markets like the US, where the fiscal and monetary stimuli have been the strongest.

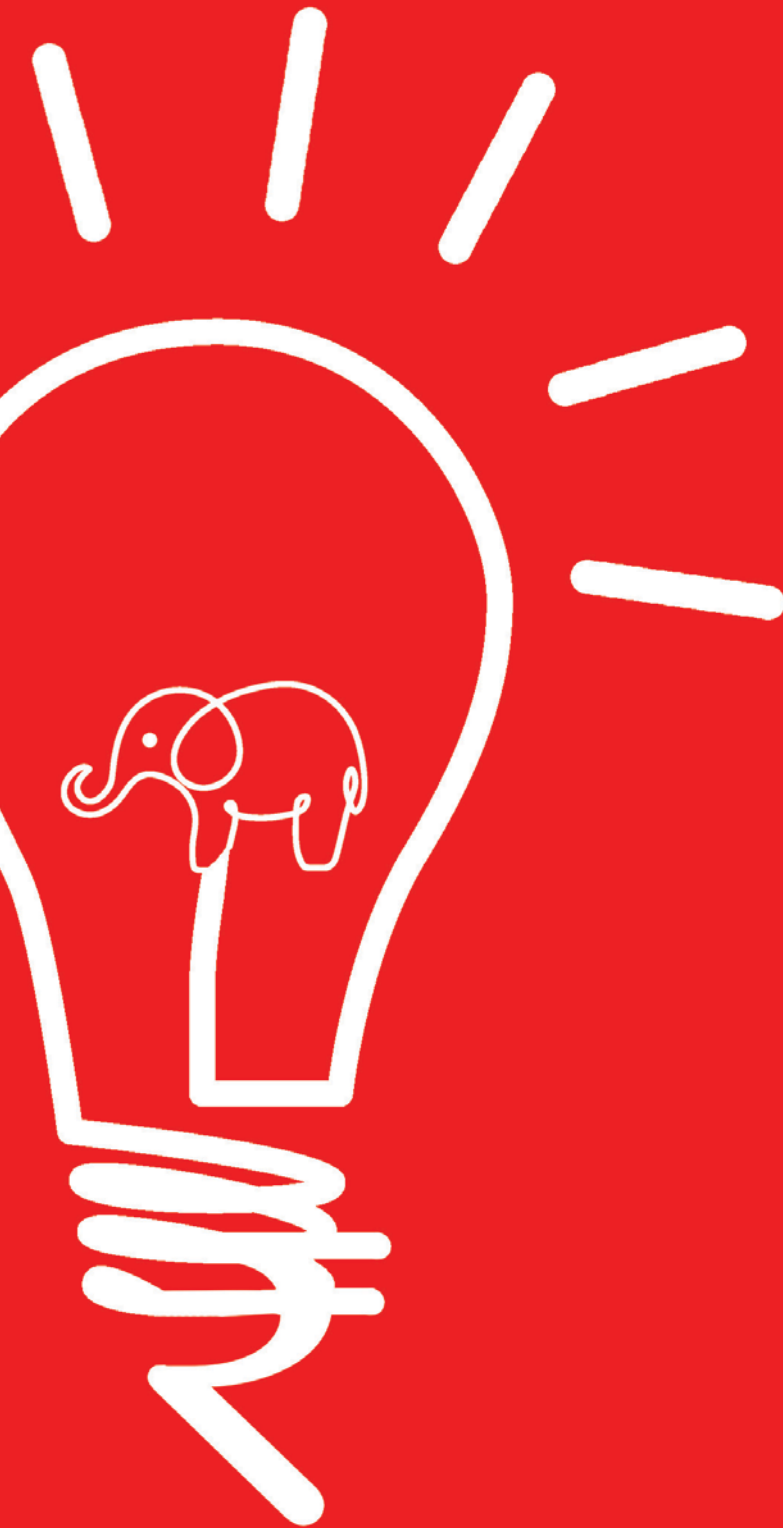
The underlying narrative in global financial markets could thus shift from worrying about inflation to worrying about growth, even as inflation remains elevated in several economies. This is a recipe for volatility in currency, bond as well as equity markets, more so as most of the current generation of traders is not familiar with a high-inflation policy backdrop in the US.

So, how would India fare? The big question about India's economy is an internal one: how close can it get to the pre-pandemic path? Consensus estimates suggest output in the next financial year would be around 10 per cent below where it would have been if Covid had not happened. This appears to be too pessimistic, and the gap may only be five percent, necessitating significant upgrades to growth forecasts for India.

Pessimists worry about the 25 million workers who have moved back from industry and services to farming, and possibly another 15 million added to working age population in the last two years. It is however unwise to categorise these job losses as permanent. The most impacted services categories are personal services, travel and tourism, and education. A full resumption of workplaces should bring back jobs in personal services in offices and at home (like house cleaners, cooks, drivers and nannies). Resumption of official and inbound international travel should help revive travel and tourism jobs. Similarly, parents who had moved their children to government schools are likely to move them back into private schools once they restart, necessitating the hiring of more teachers.

**TO MAINTAIN
INDIA'S GROWTH
MOMENTUM,
POLICYMAKERS
SHOULD FOCUS
ON INCREASING
INDIA'S SHARE OF
GLOBAL TRADE**

Illustration by NILANJAN DAS



In industrial employment, losses are in construction materials and autos. Auto production is now picking up as component shortages ease. Construction activity is likely to rebound too, as state governments, which struggled to spend through lockdowns and as a result currently have nearly Rs 3 lakh crore of unspent cash, spend again. Strong tax receipts are also creating fiscal space for the central government.

Further, after nearly a decade-long lull, which shaved more than one per cent per year from GDP growth, real-estate construction appears ready to accelerate. The inventory of ready-built houses is being absorbed by the recovery in sales volumes, as affordability has improved with record-low mortgage rates and incomes rising faster than stagnant house prices. Wage hikes due to the global rise in demand for software is helping housing markets in software development hubs. Excess savings due to lockdowns and wealth creation in financial markets are also supportive of real-estate investment.

Lastly, the informal sector, which has suffered the worst of the economic scarring and may have lost some ground permanently, should see some revival as normalcy resumes. An environment of shortages favours large and formal firms; this should change going forward, not least as the well-capitalised Indian financial sector starts to take some risks again.

Weakening global demand growth could be a headwind for export-driven sectors. However, to maintain India's growth momentum, policymakers should continue to focus on increasing India's share of global trade, both in services (where a great opportunity beckons, not just in software), and in merchandise (electronics, apparel and footwear, toys, automotive components, renewable energy equipment and chemicals, to name a few). Strong growth is necessary for at least a decade if not more, not only to bring the sovereign debt ratio down to safer levels, but also to pull people out of poverty. ■

Neelkanth Mishra is co-head of APAC Strategy and India Strategist for Credit Suisse



GOA: SELF-RELIANCE FOR SUCCESS

Prime Minister Narendra Modi lauds Chief Minister Dr Pramod Sawant on Goa's achievements as India's smallest state celebrates the 60th anniversary of its liberation.

There was much fanfare, thousands of people and a fantastic display of Goa's pride during its recent Liberation Day celebrations. India's smallest state was one of the last territories to be freed from colonial rule but has progressed quickly since that momentous day in 1961.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Goa marked the culmination of a year of celebrating the state's 60th anniversary of its liberation from Portuguese rule. He lauded the state government for its developmental achievements, noting Goa's success in various governance indices.

"The new identity of the state is that of being foremost in every task of governance. In other places where work starts, Goa has already completed it," he said during his speech at the Dr Shyama Prasad Mukherjee Stadium just outside the capital Panjim on December 19.

His brief visit included the felicitation of Goa's freedom fighters, the inauguration of various development projects, awards to panchayats and municipalities, tributes to the state's fallen heroes and attending a sail parade and fly past by armed forces stationed here.

Modi expressed particular admiration for the achievements of the state government led by Dr Pramod Sawant. Patting the chief minister on his back, Modi recognised his steps to introduce coding and robotics in schools under the Diamond Jubilee Gift

Scheme.

He said, "If Goa has an endless sea, the youth have dreams just as expansive. To fulfill these dreams we need a vision to match. I can say that Sawant is working with a vision like this. Where will Goa reach by the time it celebrates 75 years of liberation? Make new resolutions. Goa needs continuity. The pace of development should stay the same in the future. We should not stop or decrease speed."

Crediting Goa's success to all the governments that have worked for its development since its liberation in 1961, Dr Pramod Sawant pointed out that they have all done their best "to ensure the development path and see Goa where it is today". He added, "My government takes its decisions in the interest of the state and its people, irrespective of caste and religion. My government believes in sabka saath, sabka vikas."

He urged the people of this beautiful state to work unitedly towards its progress through the central and state Atmanirbhar Bharat and Swayampurna Goa initiatives, while keeping it clean, green and a sustainable, peace-loving place to ensure development in all areas.

The Prime Minister later inaugurated a slew of development projects in Goa, worth more than Rs 600 crore. These included a renovated jail museum at Fort Aguada, the prison where many freedom fighters had

been incarcerated; a super specialty block at Goa Medical College; a new district hospital in South Goa; an aviation skill development centre at the new Greenfield Airport in Mopa and a gas-insulated substation at Dabolim- Navelim near Margao.

Additionally, he released a special cover and cancellation to mark the commemoration of the Indian armed forces freeing Goa from colonial rule.

He released 'My Stamp' depicting the Hutatma Smarak at Patradevi, saluting the sacrifices of martyrs in the liberation movement, and accepted a Meghdoot postcard showcasing a collage of images of various events from the freedom struggle.

The Prime Minister accompanied the Chief Minister and State Governor P S Sreedharan Pillai to Azad Maidan, where he laid a wreath at the foot of the Martyrs Memorial and spent a few minutes in reverence of all those who laid down their lives for Goa's freedom. Modi said,

"The history of Goa's freedom struggle is not just a symbol of India's resolve, but a living document of India's unity and integrity." Pointing out that despite centuries of upheavals and transfers of power, he stated that "Goa did not forget India nor did India forget Goa", and that Goans kept the flames of freedom burning for the longest time in India's history.

During his visit, the Prime Minister also paid tribute to former Chief Minister late

Manohar Parrikar who died in office in March 2019. Parrikar, who served as Union Defence Minister from 2014 to 2017 and four terms as Chief Minister was awarded the Padma Bhushan posthumously last year.

Modi said, "When I see the achievements of Goa, this new identity being strengthened, I remember my friend Manohar Parrikarji. He not only took Goa to new heights of development, but also expanded Goa's potential. How can one remain devoted to his state, his people, till his last breath? We saw this in his life." The nation, he added, saw the reflection of the honesty, talent and diligence of the people of Goa in Parrikar.

They then proceeded to the spectacular Miramar beach where he watched the Indian Navy's fly past and sail parade.

INDIA'S BEST PERFORMING SMALL STATE

For the third year running, Goa was named India Today's Small States Winner, outperforming other contenders particularly in economy, tourism and infrastructure.

Despite being hit by the ban on mining in 2012, the economic survey of 2019-20 showed excellent promise in terms of per capita income, flow of foreign direct investment and a boost in infrastructure.

Its gross state domestic product (GSDP) growth in 2017-18 was up 12.14 per cent over the previous fiscal. Infrastructure has been boosted across the state including the new Atal Setu bridge over river Mandovi, a new bridge over the river Zuari, the Greenfield International Airport at Mopa, a four-lane road reducing traffic burden to an industrial corporation in South Goa and a new high court complex.

In addition, funds are being pumped in for the development of an electronic hub at Tuem in North Goa even as bridges in multiple locations across the state have been reconstructed to improve connectivity. As part of the Swachh Bharat, Nitol Goem mission, the government has worked towards 100 per cent door-to-door waste collection across Goa with a segregation success rate of 86 per cent in 14 urban local bodies.

A PROMISING INVESTMENT DESTINATION

Goa has borne the title of a state of sunshine and the good life ever since liberation. The government has been consistently working to add new dimensions to its revenue, other than the golden goose of tourism. The overall aim has been to turn Goa into an investment destination in order to boost employment and alternate industries in-house.

Over the last few years, the government has promoted entrepreneurship and sustainable businesses; launched numerous start-up initiatives including iMagic (\$4S)3, WE-nurture and RIVER; inaugurated an incubation centre to attract investment for Goa-based start ups; and



facilitate entrepreneurship as an alternate career option through Goa Institute of Management's Atal Incubation Centre.

Dr Pramod Sawant's vision is to 'retain Goans in Goa' by promoting opportunities and facilitating the employment eco-system. One of these is through Antha Prerna, a startup conclave and entrepreneurship summit.

As much as Rs 1.27 crores were pumped in as of April 2019 to give certified startups a financial boost. The Start-Up India Global Venture Capital Summit was also organised in Goa to mobilise global capital for innovations in the country. To support this, a new telecom infrastructure policy was introduced in 2020 to improve network connectivity for the benefit of all sections of society including tech startups, IT professionals, students, etc.

The Ignite Innovation hub at the Economic Development Corporation Ltd achieved 100 per cent capacity from entities working in artificial intelligence, machine learning, Internet of Things, smart building solutions, renewable energy, 3D printing and more.

Dr Pramod Sawant has said, "Goa has a favourable business environment. We are making policies to make Goa attractive for investors and tourists. The Investment Promotion Board will now take clearances from all departments within a fixed time frame of 15 days."

THE FIGHT AGAINST COVID-19

As a tourist state, Goa found itself

struggling against the onslaught of COVID-19.

With developing countries frantically waiting for vaccines, Goa joined the country in attempting to immunise as much of its population as fast as possible, beginning with the most important and most vulnerable sections of society.

As vaccine stocks became more freely available, the state government organised 'Tika Utsav' at multiple locations to encourage the citizens to come forward and receive vaccinations at public and private centres.

State immunisation officer Dr Rajendra Borkar said, "From March 2021, all eligible people were being vaccinated free of cost across all 42 government COVID-19 vaccination centres and 198 satellite centres via government health centres, and 27 private hospitals."

In September 2021, Prime Minister Modi extended his congratulations to the state for being the first in India to administer the first dose of the vaccine to 100 per cent of its eligible population. Chief Minister Dr Sawant has said that the government aims to declare Goa a Corona virus-free state 'as soon as possible'.

PROMOTING TRADITIONAL OCCUPATIONS

Agriculture and fishing are two of Goa's traditional occupations. Major crops include rice, coconut, cashew, sugarcane, pineapple, banana and mango. Processing of many of these crops are done in neighbouring states, and the government



is considering more investment in these sectors.

During the pandemic, the Economic Revival Committee suggested that every village have zones demarcated for community markets to enable storage, sales and packaging systems that are connected to taluka markets. A cluster approach is being proposed to promote value chains for select crops.

Earlier this year, the central government hiked the budget to modernise rural infrastructure in Goa by five times. As much as Rs 500 crore is being pumped into the state to improve development that is expected to benefit farmers, animal rearers and fisherfolk. The minimum support price of coconut and cashew nut was increased by 20 per cent and 25 per cent respectively in 2020-21.

Numerous schemes including the Assured Price Crop Compensation Scheme, Kamdhenu Scheme, Community Dairy Farming Scheme, Pashupalan Scheme, Dairy Equipment Scheme and Fodder Development Scheme are bringing benefits to more than 40,000 farmers in Goa.

Thousands have also benefited from the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi Yojana, which provides small and marginal farmers with an additional source of income of Rs 6000 per year.

The fishing community has also received various types of assistance including a subsidy on loans up to Rs 5 lakhs to purchase fishing equipment, 50 per cent subsidy on setting up aquaculture farms and a subsidy of Rs 30 per litre on a maximum consumption of 1700 litres of petrol.

A mega fish festival was held this year, along with the launch of the Matsya Setu app, the Goa State Mariculture Policy and a ban on LED fishing.

FUNDING THE FUTURE

The state government aims to improve education across the board, raising access to better quality education in rural areas and also looking at becoming an education hub through tie ups with private universities.

It has been working on implementing measures from the National Education Policy, while also investing heavily - as much as Rs 60 crores - in technical education. Prime Minister Modi has himself lauded the Chief Minister's initiatives to include training for coding and robotics in schools through partnerships with hardware and software companies known globally for high quality equipment, training and knowledge.

An e-portal (DISHTAVO) and state board app have been launched to provide information on study materials, question papers, notifications and circulars to students across Goa. To encourage creative thinking among young minds, Chief Minister Dr Sawant inaugurated an innovation hub at the Goa Science Centre.

During the pandemic, important academic and competitive examinations were conducted with various safety measures in place. In addition, the state waived off half the tuition, gymkhana and cultural fees for academic admissions in all colleges under the purview of the Directorate of Higher Education.

According to reports, Goa ranks highest for its infrastructure at school levels and human resources. The state also boasts one of the best ratios for girls in higher education in India, and the third best pupil-teacher ratio in the country.

Funds have been allotted for smart classrooms, development of laboratories, improved sanitary facilities, and scholarship programmes for orphans. The government is also working to set up a permanent

campus for Indian Institute of Technology in the state. The foundation stone for the National Forensic Science University was laid by Union Home Minister Amit Shah which will usher in a new era in forensic science in India.

SWAYAMPURNA GOA

The Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan or Self-Reliant India campaign is a vision by Prime Minister Narendra Modi to make the country and its citizens independent particularly in economy, infrastructure, systems, vibrant demography and demand.

Inspired by this call, Goa Chief Minister Dr Pramod Sawant devised the Swayampurna Goa initiative, launched in October 2020 with special state government officers appointed to carry out various tasks in panchayats and municipalities.

The objective is to ensure every village in the state becomes self-reliant by harnessing locally available resources. The action plan covers agriculture, animal husbandry, tourism, fisheries and natural resources. It also involves issues related to youth and adolescents, senior citizens, women and self-help groups through various schemes and their convergence.

In February 2021, the central government allocated Rs 300 crore to celebrate the 60th anniversary of Goa's liberation, which the Chief Minister promised would focus on creating a blue economy in Goa which is beneficial to its people.

He had said, "The allocated amount will not only be used for infrastructure development, but also for human development under the Swayampurna Goa scheme." His initiatives have so far been praised by the Prime Minister when he interacted with the state government officers and beneficiaries of the programme.

Modi said, "Goa has achieved 100 per cent target in many programmes. It has achieved its target of 100 per cent electricity connection to every household. India set the goal of being free from open defecation. Goa reached this mark as well. In Har Ghar Jal Abhiyan, Goa was the first state to accomplish this goal. The state also obtained 100 per cent in providing free ration to the poor. Schemes for women are being successfully implemented at the ground level in Goa. The infrastructure being developed in the state will help in increasing the income of farmers, animal rearers, and fisherfolk. In 2021, the fund for modernisation of the rural infrastructure in Goa has been increased by five times compared to last year."

He further pointed out that the successful stories of the Swayampurna Goa initiative are the product of innovative, sensitive and responsible bureaucracy. "Goa means nature and tourism, but today it also means a new

model of development and reflection of collective efforts,” he said.

THE BIGGER PICTURE

Dr Pramod Sawant said he was moved by the plight of grandmothers of remote villages who cannot visit bigger towns, widowed mothers in need of assistance to manage their lives and supplement their livelihoods, and people with disabilities in need of last-mile support. He believes the goal of self-reliance can only be reached if every last person - irrespective of caste and creed - receives the benefits of these initiatives.

He said, “The initiative was launched to make the application process for schemes swift. People in Goa are aware of schemes such as Griha Aadhar (for housewives), Laadli Laxmi (for girl child) and the Deen Dayal Swasthya Seva Yojana (for health). But they do not know of any others. I want them to know and apply for these 150 schemes. Information about them and applications are available on the Goaonline web portal. We aim to fulfil our promises including housing, water, electricity and insurance for all. Along with schemes and services, we want people to gain employment via our model career centres.”

HOW IT WORKS

An extensive study conducted by the Directorate of Higher Education and Goa Institute of Public Administration and Rural Development helped understand the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats in all 191 Panchayats in Goa. It also investigated the available resources and talents that could help revitalise the village economy.

Findings indicated that although Goa offers one of the highest subsidies in India for farming, there is poor response due to lack of awareness and low motivation among youngsters to participate in this occupation.

Residents of villages and municipalities are offered the opportunity to put forth their grievances before government representatives on a designated day. Information about various schemes, services and welfare programmes will be disbursed at dedicated counters.

The programme aims to offer prompt solutions to frequent problems faced by Goans, including roads, water supply, electricity and other basic amenities. Through the day, pending applications and dues on Ration cards, Aadhar cards, voter ID cards, Kisan cards, Dayanand Social Security scheme, Irrigation scheme and Tribal Welfare schemes will be processed.

Services available through the Swayampurna Goa initiative include issuance of residence certificates, ration cards, income certificates and beneficiary cards from Goa

Electronics Limited; Deen Dayal Swasthya Seva Yojana; Griha Aadhar; social welfare schemes; electricity connections and issues; water connections; household toilets; mutation, partition and conversion of land; agricultural welfare schemes; child project development welfare schemes; labour welfare schemes and issues; veterinary schemes; lead banks, Atal Insurance and credit card facilities; and schemes related to tribal welfare, fisheries, the Economic Development Corporation, Water Resources, Public Works Department and towards the welfare of the economically weaker sections of society.

PROGRESS SO FAR

The aim in October 2021 was for 10 main targets including water and electricity connections, shelter and sanitation for all homes, beneficiary cards for farmers, aid for people with disabilities and senior citizens, as well as health, social and financial security for vulnerable sections of society to be covered.

During his visit to Goa, Prime Minister Narendra Modi presented awards to the best performing panchayats, municipalities and state government officers called

“Swayampurna Mitras.” He had earlier interacted with beneficiaries and stakeholders of the Swayampurna Goa initiative and discovered how thousands of people were already benefiting from it.

In villages across Goa, there are success stories of women’s empowerment, medical treatment for those unable to afford it, free medical check-ups, training and machinery given to self-help groups, aid to people with disabilities and tribals, vaccination awareness, assistance to farmers and fisherfolk, beneficiary cards, provisions for toilets, water and electricity connections, waste management systems, solar energy and even promotion of eco-tourism.

The second phase of the Swayampurna Goa initiative began in October 2021 and will run until October 2022 when the third phase kicks off. Prime Minister Narendra Modi pointed out, “The Swayampurna Goa initiative is not a programme of five months or five years, but the first phase of a vision for the next 25 years. All the people should come together for this. With the blessings of the whole state, we will fulfil the goal of Swayampurna Goa.”



AWARDS & ACCOLADES RECEIVED BY GOA

STATE OF STATES

- Named Best Performing Small State overall for the third consecutive year at India Today’s State of States Conclave 2020
- Named Best Performing Small State in Economy, Tourism and Infrastructure categories

INFRASTRUCTURE

- Certified Open Defecation Free by Quality Control of India, as part of the Swachh Bharat Mission

TOURISM

- Awarded Best Tourism Destination in 2019
- Awarded National Award for Tourism
- First Indian state to receive a Safe Travels stamp from World Travel & Tourism Council, India Initiative

EMPLOYMENT

- Ranked 1st in India in Facilitating Innovation by the 2019-20 India Innovation Index Report
- Ranked 6th in India in terms of Innovative Approach by the 2019-20 India Innovation Index Report

EDUCATION

- Indian Institute of Technology established in Goa
- 40% of all seats in National Institute of Technology Goa reserved for Goan students

LAW & ORDER

- Goa Police awarded the FICCI Smart Policing Awards in 2016 & 2018 for commendable performance in community policing



By **ROHAN MURTY**

D

Driven by metrics like daily active users, companies strive to engage all of us in online commerce, media, entertainment and social connections, among others. But these are all activities that we do in *addition* to work. We arguably spend more time at work than on most other activities every day. Work is an important part of our intellectual and emotional lives. It gives us financial security and a sense of purpose, meaning and identity. Hence, what we do at work and how we do it matters.

Today, office work has become digital work and the pandemic has accelerated this shift. Communication and productivity tools have helped streamline digital work to make it more efficient and less cumbersome. However, what is not well-understood is *how* we work—do we all work the same way, where do we differ, what we enjoy, what we find boring, frustrating or painful, among others. Understanding how we work is a precursor to what we can do to change our experience at work.

But, when compared to the billions invested in building social media platforms to help us connect with people, to find jobs, share cat photos, etc., there has been a much lower investment in technology to understand the human experience at work and to make it better. Case in point—when was the last time you heard of tech innovations to help teams discover opportunities for mentorship at work, mitigate frustrations, find help, or share pain?

How big is this problem? There are an estimated 500 million plus office workers world-wide who spend at least 5 hours each day on digital work. Even though the



THE NEXT LABOUR REVOLUTION

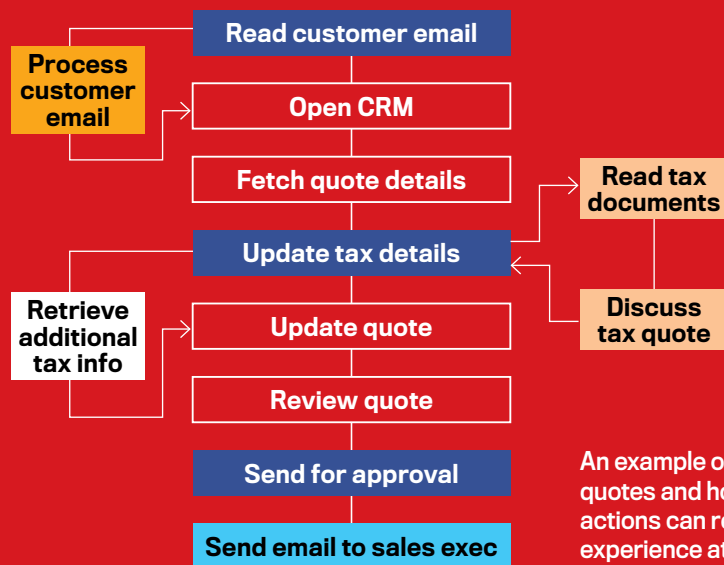
THE FUTURE OF WORK RESTS ON USING TECHNOLOGY TO UNDERSTAND AND IMPROVE EMPLOYEES' EXPERIENCE AT WORK

world spends trillions of dollars on office work, we have not yet seen the improvement of employee experience become an imperative economic issue that technology can address. Finally, the pandemic has isolated a large fraction of office workers at home, given them more opportunities to shift jobs across the globe, and therefore made it harder to retain talent. Hence, it is more important than ever to care

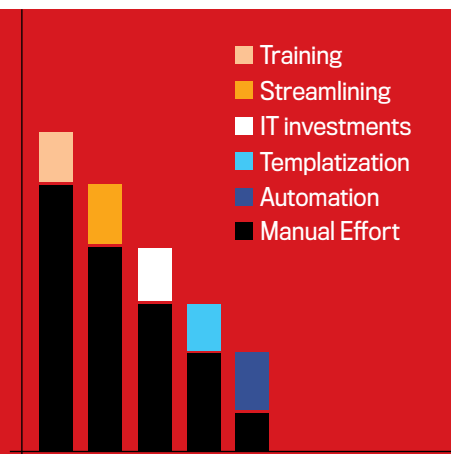
about the employee experience.

Organisations do pay heed to these concerns but are stifled by lack of sufficient innovation in technology. For example, companies hire people who manually interview a few people across teams, gather high-level data through interviews and then offer advice on how to streamline work. But these approaches are incomplete, analog and not scalable. Can technology offer a

HOW A QUOTE IS GENERATED



An example of a work graph of a team generating quotes and how it can be used to figure out what actions can reduce friction in the team's daily experience at work



better solution? Here is one possibility. Recent advances in computing and machine learning offer new means for using data to understand and improve the employee experience. The approach entails (1) sampling how teams interact with software at work, (2) applying machine learning to this data to decipher patterns of how teams work and (3) identifying the team's pain points from these patterns and improving the team's experience. An invariant to this approach is to preserve privacy by anonymising the individual and focusing on the team patterns instead.

The key insight is to treat the very act of doing work as a source of data versus traditional approaches that only treat the outcome of work as data (e.g., how many transactions did a team close?). This data is then useful to drive change at the workplace. At the heart of this vision are 'work graphs'—maps that are a connected sequence of steps that teams execute to get work done. Work graphs are generated automatically using machine learning to learn from how teams interact with software at work and form a basis for understanding work at any

scale. These maps of how teams execute are similar to the world wide web graphs that power search engines or connections between people (social graphs) that power most social platforms.

A work graph is the DNA of how digital work happens. And like DNA, the work graph is a single source of information to understand, diagnose and fix several problems with data.

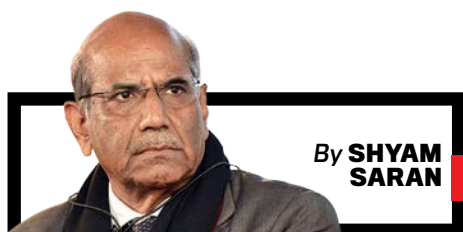
A team's experience at work can be distilled from the patterns in the work graph. Hence, a wide variety of insights can be gleaned: for example, frustrations with IT and technology that hurt teams' daily experiences, patterns of work common across teams and hence opportunities for mentoring or learning, broken patterns of work revealing tedious and unnecessary complexity in work patterns for teams, among others. The alternative to the work graph is to rely on interviewing people, guess work, gut instinct and hoping changes in organisations help. A recent article in the *Harvard Business Review* used work graphs to reveal the gap between how management expects their teams to get work done versus the reality is about 60

per cent wide. Therefore, these organisations must first better understand their teams' experiences at work before making changes to benefit the team. Else their efforts may not be effective in helping their people.

The scale of data in the work graph is likely larger than social media, which is widely known to generate a large volume of data that fuels businesses. For example, for every single interaction on social media platforms (e.g., a user clicked on "Search for a job" or "Like a comment"), there are 40x more digital interactions that take place at work (e.g., "Sent an email"). After all, the world spends between 6-8 hours every day on digital devices at work and there is data underneath these activities.

Thus far the world has not seen how we experience work as a technology problem. But the pandemic has changed this. Given the scale of office work in the world, this is a consumer-scale opportunity inside the workplace. This, I believe, will be a theme for 2022. ■

Rohan Murty is the founder and chief technical officer at Soroco



By **SHYAM
SARAN**

GEOPOLITICAL SCENARIO

TIME TO REVITALISE THE ACT EAST POLICY

THE OMICRON THREAT ON THE GLOBAL ECONOMY, THE EMBOLDENING OF TERROR GROUPS AFTER THE TALIBAN TAKEOVER IN AFGHANISTAN AND CHINA'S GEOPOLITICAL AMBITIONS SPELL UNFORESEEN CHALLENGES FOR INDIA

T

The new normal is anything but 'normal'. 2022 will be a more unpredictable year than the one we left behind. The Covid-19 virus is mutating all the time and the world is unable to keep up. Just when we thought the worst may be behind us, the more transmissible Omicron variant is spreading across the world. Borders which were being opened tentatively, gingerly are snapping shut again. Airline business, which was limping back to solvency, is likely to face terminal decline and most service industries, such as hotels, restaurants, travel and retail, will further suffer severe blows. The major world economies responded to the health crisis and the acute economic and social disruptions in the wake of the pandemic by expending an estimated \$11 trillion (Rs 819 lakh crore) over the past two years. There is not much firepower left in their economic armouries to sustain such massive outlays for another year.

We are experiencing the beginning of an inflationary surge. This is likely to sharpen in 2022. If central banks in the advanced economies react by raising interest rates and reducing the liquidity overhang built up over the recent past, then developing countries, including India, are likely to see significant financial outflows. Their cost of external borrowing will go up. 2022 will be a more challenging year for

both the developed and developing economies but as is always the case, the latter will suffer the most. India has seen some welcome signs of economic recovery lately, but this will be difficult to sustain.

China introduced and has recently re-introduced the most severe lockdowns by any country. Their impact has been offset to some extent by a surge in Chinese exports of health equipment and pharmaceutical ingredients. China was an island of relative economic stability in a highly disrupted global economy, and this reinforced its geopolitical profile. But as we head into the new year, the Chinese economy looks more vulnerable. The debt to GDP ratio of over 280 per cent looks unsustainable for an economy likely to grow by a slower 5 per cent in 2022. Another vulnerability relates to the property and construction sectors, which contribute roughly 30 per cent to China's growth. The largest real estate firm, Evergrande, is facing bankruptcy and others are also in dire straits. This may trigger an economic and financial crisis which even China's state-led dispensation may not be able to contain. The pandemic has adversely affected the country's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects and concerns over debt exposure and political pushback have surfaced in several partner countries. A slowing Chinese economy may pose a bigger problem than the relentlessly advancing one because there are no other drivers of global growth remotely close to China's scale.

Geopolitics is in a churn and is likely to become even more volatile. The key equation is between China and the US. Since the global economic crisis of 2008, China has assessed that it has fundamentally altered the balance of power in its favour and entered a phase of significant strategic opportunity. Its assertive and even aggressive foreign policy is anchored in this perception. Will China have passed its peak in 2022 and could this result in the retrenchment of its "wolf warrior diplomacy"? Or will it double down on its increas-

ingly coercive and unilateral assertion of its interests—interests that have expanded as its power has? Either trend is possible and may become apparent in Chinese actions on Taiwan and its posture on the India-China border.

China looks at power in relative terms. It may be entering a phase of diminished growth and even over-extension, but its perception of the credibility of the US has diminished even further thanks to the precipitate and chaotic American withdrawal from Afghanistan. It may well be tempted to resolve

QUAD PARTNERS MAY PRESS INDIA TO PLAY AN OVERT ROLE IN TAIWAN. THIS MAY EXPOSE NEW DELHI TO MORE PRESSURE ON ITS BORDERS WITH CHINA

the Taiwan issue in its favour either through a blockade or military occupation, convinced that the US will have no stomach for a fight. The new year is likely to provide more tangible clues regarding Chinese calculations but increased tensions in the Taiwan Strait are a given. This may confront India with difficult choices if its partners in the Quad, all of whom have much greater stake in the Taiwan issue than New Delhi does, press for its greater formalisation and its more overtly military role. This may expose India to greater pressure on its land border with China.

The Taliban takeover of Afghanistan is a setback for India. It has given Pakistan geopolitical leverage even if this proves to be short-lived. Pakistan has ensured that the dominant faction

in the ruling dispensation in Kabul is the Haqqani group, which was described by former Pentagon chief Mike Mullen as a "veritable arm of the ISI". It is the Haqqanis who targeted the Indian embassy and Indian nationals in Afghanistan on behalf of the ISI. Any effort by India to revive its presence in the country in any form will always be risky. Indian humanitarian and economic aid will be welcome at a time when the country is facing famine and economic collapse but this will not provide any meaningful leverage.

The Taliban takeover is proving to be a major morale booster for jihadi groups, who are already turning their attention to Jammu and Kashmir and other targets in India. China will be a more powerful shield for Pakistan in international fora, frustrating Indian efforts to isolate Pakistan diplomatically on the issue of cross-border terrorism. India has done well to coordinate with regional countries to deal with the security challenge posed by the political change in Kabul. Inviting the Central Asian states as chief guests at the forthcoming Republic Day is an imaginative move but its substantive impact must not be overrated.

One hopes that 2022 will be the year of a revitalised Act East policy. The key to this is a return to the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Agreement. India cannot dispense with the economic and commercial pillar of Act East. It should also revive its application to become a member of Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), which does not entail making trade concessions but will provide a networking and learning platform for Indian business and industry. India is the only Quad member which is not an APEC member. It should leverage its Quad credentials to become one. These are some of the initiatives which may help India navigate what will be another year of unpredictability and fresh challenges. ■

Shyam Saran is a former foreign secretary and senior fellow, Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi





By Andrew
Small

CHINA AND INDIA

FUTURE TRENDS 2022

IN THE DRAGON'S FIRING LINE

CHINA'S INCREASING PENCHANT FOR ESCALATING CRISES AND LIVING WITH ANTAGONISTIC RELATIONSHIPS ON MULTIPLE FRONTS PROMISES A TURBULENT YEAR AHEAD FOR SOUTH ASIA, WITH INDIA AT THE HEART OF IT

C

China analysts are increasingly used to revisiting from scratch what Beijing is likely to do in a given situation rather than assuming it will follow precedent. The overturning of longstanding foreign policy norms and agreements has itself become a predictable feature of the Chinese approach in South Asia, as elsewhere.

In theory, 2022 should be

a more stable year than the last two. An upcoming Party Congress would typically see any Chinese Communist Party general secretary seeking to maintain a calm external environment. Yet even this cannot be taken for granted. There will certainly be attempts to ensure that Xi Jinping experiences no nasty surprises in the autumn as he enters the next phase of his consolidation of power. But as Chinese behaviour during the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic illustrated, periods of defensiveness and insecurity are now prone to translate into belligerence and ever more creative forms of coercion rather than efforts to settle differences on mutually acceptable terms.

China has a greater appetite for escalating crises than it did in the past, and evidently believes itself capable of living with antago-

nistic relationships on multiple fronts. The fact that the lead-up to the last Party Congress was overshadowed by the Doklam standoff will not be forgotten. We are likely to see heightened Chinese paranoia about its Himalayan borders, and a determination not to repeat what Beijing sees as mistakes it made that year, when it felt it was on the back foot.

While the five-yearly conclave will condition much of the coming year, there are several broader factors that are likely to affect China's general handling of the region. The most important is Beijing's dynamic with Washington. Almost every state interacting with China has experienced the degree to which it is becoming less willing to separate its bilateral relationships from the wider struggle that Beijing sees unfolding with the

United States. China's main headache is not just Washington itself, but the countervailing coalitions that form the heart of US policy under the Joe Biden administration: the Quad, AU-KUS, the increasing China focus of the G7 and other groupings, dubbed "small cliques" by Xi. If they hold and deepen, they will ensure a long-term global balance of power that works to China's disfavor across multiple domains, from Indo-Pacific security to the contest for technological leadership.

India is at the heart of a number of these overlapping coalitions, and can expect to be seen and treated by China more and more through the prism of geopolitical considerations rather than bilateral ones. In a more nimble phase of Chinese diplomacy, this might have resulted in efforts to incentivise states to peel away and maintain their distance from Washington. Nowadays, to the chagrin of China's more sophisticated foreign policy practitioners, Beijing is almost exclusively using sticks.

This intensifies a longer-term trend towards bloc politics in the region. The US-China rivalry, deepening US-India relations, weakening US-Pakistan ties, a tighter China-Pakistan bond, and the deteriorating Sino-Indian relationship represent a mutually reinforcing set of dynamics hardening political lines in South Asia that were once more fluid. It is an uncomfortable context for China's friends too. Pakistan has spent decades navigating between its relationships with Washington and Beijing that typically coexisted quite happily. Now, the sense of pressure to "choose sides" in various areas is growing, and while Pakistan's preference is still to avoid an unhealthy level of dependence on China, the room for manoeuvre is shrinking.

While structural factors continue to push the two sides more closely together, this is far from a golden period in Sino-Pakistani ties. The China-

Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which was supposed to put the relationship on a broader-based and more ambitious footing, has stalled. For several years, the domestic, economic and political situation in Pakistan has presented an array of obstacles not only to the two sides agreeing to any significant new projects, but also executing existing commitments, such as the Gwadar port.

More recently, the security picture has also deteriorated. The bombing last year in Dasu in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was by some measures the single worst attack on Chinese personnel in Pakistan, and was coupled with a disturbing number of near-misses. Beijing sees these developments as in-

limited to humanitarian aid, modest trade openings, and at best some smaller projects, with the suggestion that a lot more will follow if the security situation permits and if the government moves on China's political demands, particularly in cracking down on Uyghur militant groups. In practice, this is likely to mean years of Chinese slow-rolling on major projects and a focus on threat containment and risk management rather than any great enthusiasm for the country's perennially-difficult-to-extract mineral resources. In the wider contest with the United States, Beijing is still prone to seeing Afghanistan as a trap.

The net result in the coming period is a bifurcation in China's ap-

US-CHINA RIVALRY, DEEPENING US-INDIA RELATIONS AND A TIGHTER CHINA-PAKISTAN BOND MEAN THE HARDENING OF POLITICAL LINES IN SOUTH ASIA

trinsically bound up with the situation in Afghanistan. China's fear after the US withdrawal was less about what might happen in Afghanistan itself, where its interests are minimal, but the ramifications across the wider region—Pakistan above all. Adding heightened Chinese caution to the already-troubled picture for CPEC means we can expect the initiative's slowdown to persist in the year ahead, while any transformative "game-changing" hopes have largely faded.

The same caution will characterise Beijing's policy across the border. For all that China remains one of the few states to have a decent working relationship with the Taliban government, Beijing has limited confidence in the Taliban's capacity to ensure adequate conditions to risk economic commitments on a meaningful scale. China's support will, therefore, remain

proach between the vacated spaces of continental Asia, where Beijing is wary of being sucked in, and the intensifying geopolitical rivalry in the rest of South Asia. One domain is seen as a potential set of liabilities, where China's risk appetite has diminished even compared to a few years ago, when Belt and Road Initiative investments were in full flow. The other is seen as an increasingly "hot" theater of competition, where—as Beijing has already demonstrated at India's borders—it is willing to tear up old arrangements in order to advance a vision of its interests that bears less and less resemblance to the pragmatic, patient, prudent and predictable form of the past. ■

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INDIA
TODAY

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By **Sunita
Narain**

CLIMATE CHANGE

FUTURE TRENDS 2022

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When it comes to climate change, three truths must define the way the world, and India, act to combat this challenge. First, we must recognise the urgent reality of extreme weather, attributed to emissions from burning of fossil fuels, that is devastating the entire world. Therefore, the world must act to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, fast and drastically. There should be no arguments on this.

Second, greenhouse gas emissions, mainly emitted from burning of fossil fuels, are related to economic growth as we know it and, more importantly, the emissions have a long life in the atmosphere. So, when the world talks about an agreement to mitigate emissions it is discussing sharing the growth between nations and between generations. This is why global action to reduce emissions must be differentiated, based on the country's contribution to the problem. Climate justice is not a moral but essential prerequisite.

Third, a country like India, which has not contributed to the stock of emissions in the atmosphere but is a victim of climate change—the poor in our world are the worst hit today because of intensification of tropical cyclones or extreme weather and rain—must act to reduce carbon dioxide emissions in self-interest. It must do so, not only to help the planet combat climate change, but to ensure that its toxic health burden from a fast degrading environment is reduced.

It is here that we must recognise the announcements made by the Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi at the re-

CLEANING UP INDIA'S ENERGY SYSTEMS

**IN THE FIGHT AGAINST CLIMATE CHANGE,
INDIA'S REAL CHALLENGE WILL NOT BE
BUILDING INFRASTRUCTURE, BUT
ENSURING THAT EVEN THE POOREST CAN
PAY THE COST OF THIS 'CLEAN' ENERGY**

cent climate change conference (COP26) held in Glasgow. The most important of the commitments made is that India will meet 50 per cent of its energy requirements from renewable sources by 2030. This is big—no question about it. The fact is energy system transformation is what will drive mitigation in the world. In effect, what India is saying is that its future energy infrastructure will be ‘green’—it will not give up coal, but it will drastically reduce its dependence on this black gold, which is indicted as the key cause of climate change emissions.

Let’s look at the numbers. Currently, India’s dependence on coal to meet its energy needs is near absolute—in 2019, coal-based thermal power was 63 per cent of the installed capacity and met 80 per cent of the country’s energy needs. But if this plan has to go through, then by 2030 the country will have to turn this around. According to the Central Electricity Authority, dependence on coal-based energy would go down to about 56 per cent and the rest would be from renewable energy. To achieve this target, India would need to increase its renewable portfolio from 100 Giga Watt (GW) currently to between 650-700 GW by 2030, while coal-based energy would be roughly 280 GW—a marginal increase from now. This sounds daunting, as it should. But it is also feasible, if we plan it deliberately and with imagination.

The fact is, we need a reinvention of our energy system to meet critical livelihood and economic needs of millions of our people. Today, India’s energy system is so broken that it takes the cheapest energy generation—coal-based thermal power—and supplies it so that it becomes, arguably, the most expensive in the world. The reasons are manifold; from the perverse subsidy systems that end up *not* benefitting the poor users and farmers, in whose name it is given, to the huge leakages and inefficiencies in the power distribution companies (discoms). But the bottom-line is that

India continues to be debilitated by energy poverty as millions remain in the dark and women continue to cook on biomass-based stoves, which are bad for their health. On the other hand, the richer consumers opt out of the same broken energy system to use even dirtier sources, from diesel for generators to coal and petcoke for boilers and captive power plants. All this has deadly health impacts as coal use grows in both highly polluting power plants and individual boilers. This is not economical or sustainable. It has to change.

This is where the new energy systems can play a role. But it requires investment, not just in building infra-

INDIA HAS SAID ITS FUTURE ENERGY INFRASTRUCTURE WILL BE ‘GREEN’—IT WILL NOT GIVE UP COAL, BUT WILL DRASTICALLY REDUCE ITS DEPENDENCE ON IT

structure, but in rebuilding the distribution and supply network to be clean and efficient. The real challenge is not building infrastructure but ensuring even the poorest can pay the cost of this ‘clean’ energy. This is really where the nub of the problem is. We need to look beyond renewable to see how this clean energy can be affordable so that growth is inclusive. This is the opportunity to use climate finance so that it pays not just for setting up clean energy plants but pays the difference in the cost that it would take to make this energy accessible to all.

So, what needs to be done in 2022?

First, we need a plan for climate change action in the country. This has to be ‘business as unusual’ and has to work out the options for emission reduction in each sector of India’s economy and how we will benchmark change. We have always been reluctant to do this, given that it would bind us to emission reduction targets globally. But we have to bite this bullet. We know we have options today to reinvent growth without pollution. We will build our energy, building, industry and city mobility infrastructure. So, the opportunity is to redesign to make it more resource efficient, more affordable and, as a result, more sustainable. The plan needs numbers and a roadmap on how we will get to 2030 and what it will cost—this funding requirement is important as climate change finance has to be part of this transformation.

The second agenda for 2022 is to work on a strategy to address the horrendous impacts of climate change—from flooding because of extreme rain and drought because of scarce rain to increased frequency of tropical cyclones or other weather changes. We need intervention strategies to address these changes and fast. For instance, the farmers need increased support for crop losses and, for this, the government must rework the insurance scheme to meet this challenge. Then we need to ensure that every time it rains, our cities do not go underwater—this needs the urban renewal programme to focus on protection of lakes, ponds and green areas in settlements. The biggest gamechanger would be in building resilience against these repeated shocks by investing in water conservation and green livelihoods in rural India. I could go on. But the real change in 2022 is that we get serious about this existential threat. ■

Sunita Narain is Editor, Down to Earth, and Director of the Centre for Science and Environment



By Siraj
Hussain &
Shweta
Saini



AGRICULTURE AFTER THE FARM LAWS

PUSH A NEW CROP OF REFORMS

THE FARMERS' AGITATION AGAINST THE
CONTENTIOUS FARM LAWS BROUGHT
INDIAN AGRICULTURE TO THE CENTRE
OF PUBLIC CONSCIOUSNESS. THE
MOMENTUM FOR CRITICAL REFORMS
SHOULD NOT BE LOST NOW

Illustration by RAJ VERMA

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The sudden announcement by the prime minister of the decision to repeal the three central farm laws is seen by many as the end of the road for agricultural reforms. It surely isn't. There are a few learnings from the 15 months of the farmers' agitation:

Consultations are critical and it is important to be seen as fair

The agitation forced the government to realise that for undertaking reforms in agriculture, consultations have to be inclusive and wider. Direct talks with experts and farmers' representatives may be necessary in 2022 for the future of structural reforms in agriculture. After all, the views of CII, FICCI and PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry are considered by the government while formulating policies on incentives, investment, import/export, taxation, etc.

The two most important incentives extended to farmers in the past few years—fixing MSP (minimum support price) at a minimum 50 per cent over the paid out costs (A2) along with cost of family labour (FL), and the yearly Rs 6,000 provided under the PM-Kisan scheme—did not emerge from consultation with farmers or state governments. They were unilateral announcements by the Centre. Now that the government has announced a committee of experts to delve into contentious issues, such as crop-

WHILE REFORMS NEED TO BE LED BY STATES, THEY ALSO HAVE TO BE STRUCTURED COHESIVELY IN KEEPING WITH THE NEEDS OF THE COUNTRY AS A WHOLE

ping patterns, fertiliser subsidy and the future of MSP, it is hoped that credible experts and farmers' representatives from various agro-climatic zones will be nominated in the panel.

Customise reforms to states' realities

India's states are at different stages of agricultural development and have varied constraints regarding resource endowment and agro-ecological vulnerabilities. So, policies will need to be tailored to meet their requirements. A one-size-fits-all approach will not be the way forward.

Reforms need local thrust and macro pragmatism

One of the other big learnings is that while reforms need to be led by states, they also have to be designed pragmatically and structured cohesively in keeping with the needs of the country as a whole. India is home to a large proportion of the world's poor and malnourished. The

country cannot afford to not have surpluses of its staple crops, such as wheat, rice and pulses. In 2022, the Centre needs to ensure convergence between the aspirations/requirements of states and India's long term needs. A country-level plan of production, for example, can bring efficiency to use of resources. Combining it with states' plans may deliver a win-win for all.

There are several key areas in agriculture that need reforms in 2022:

Fertiliser subsidy

One of the most difficult reforms relates to fertiliser subsidy. For a long time, it has been debated that Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) of fertiliser subsidy on the basis of per hectare land holding can put a check on excessive use of urea. Due to steep rise in global prices of fertilisers, the Centre may have to spend Rs 1.55 lakh crore on fertiliser subsidy whereas the budget estimate for 2021-22 is only Rs 79,530 crore.

Despite widespread tenancy and leasing of land, only a tenth of it is on record (as per agricultural census). So, any DBT of fertiliser subsidy will only reach the landholder and not the actual cultivator. Moreover, there is huge variation in per hectare consumption of fertiliser. In 2019-20, Kerala consumed 36.5 kg per ha of nitrogen, phosphorus and potash while Bihar consumed 245.3 kg per ha—highest in the country and more than even Punjab's (243 kg per ha). Uniform DBT of fertiliser subsidy across states is not easy. So, informed consultations are needed with stakeholders from various states to formulate a policy that does not compromise on food production.

Food security

A large section of India's urban middle class considers food security as a given. They do not realise that the country's surpluses for most of the agricultural production are marginal. In addition, the impact of climate change on food security remains uncertain. If the economy actually grows at 7-8 per cent per annum and the benefits percolate to the masses, the demand for agricultural produce, especially proteins, fruits and vegetables, will grow and the current surpluses in some commodities may end. Concerted efforts to improve yields and reduce losses are thus pivotal.

Climate impact on sustainability of agriculture

Another critical issue on which consensus needs to be reached urgently this year is the agro-ecological sustainability of India's original Green Revolution regions, such as Punjab, Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh. Similarly, cultivation of sugarcane in the water-stressed regions of Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, etc. is unsustainable.

In Punjab, the area under paddy has increased from 2 million ha (48

per cent of net sown area) in 1990-91 to 3.1 million ha (75 per cent of net sown area) in 2018-19. This expansion of area under paddy has come at the expense of pulses and oilseeds. Similarly, the area under sugarcane in Maharashtra has increased from 0.44 lakh ha in 1990-91 to 1.16 lakh ha in 2018-19. According to calculations by the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CAPC) (Price Policy for Sugarcane 2019-20), of the profitability of various crops from 2014-15 to 2016-17, sugarcane was the most profitable, compared to any

THE URBAN MIDDLE CLASS CONSIDERS FOOD SECURITY AS A GIVEN BUT IN REALITY, INDIA'S SURPLUSES FOR MOST AGRI PRODUCE ARE MARGINAL

other combination of crops. Paddy and wheat gave about 50 per cent relative gross returns (over A2+FL) compared to sugarcane. Incidentally, sugarcane is the only crop for which all buyers are legally mandated to pay the price fixed by the government. Farmers are demanding the same for all crops.

The policy of guaranteed prices of sugarcane, along with introduction of new varieties, is largely responsible for the increase in area under sugarcane, from 3.68 million ha in 1991-21 to 5.06 million ha in 2018-19. As a result, India produces

about 32-33 million tonnes of sugar a year while the domestic demand is only about 25.5 million tonnes. To enable sugar mills to pay the cane price to farmers, the central and state governments have been offering a number of incentives, ranging from creation of a buffer stock to interest subvention on loans to subsidy on export of sugar. The expert committee on cropping patterns will look at not only the cultivation of paddy in Punjab, Haryana and western Uttar Pradesh but also at sugarcane in various states.

Strengthen APMCs and invest in infrastructure

Even before the three farm laws were enacted in 2020, there was a consensus that serious reforms were needed in agricultural marketing, including APMCs (Agricultural Produce Market Committees). These include liberal issue of trading licences, a uniform market fee of not more than 2 per cent across states, a single unified licence for all APMCs in a state and no restriction on movement of agricultural produce within and outside the states. These reforms are well within the powers of the state governments. However, a central law may still be required for interstate trade. The model APMC laws circulated by the Centre since 2003 had aimed to achieve this. It should not be difficult for the Centre to persuade the states run by the BJP to implement these marketing reforms.

The farmers' agitation has created enormous public awareness and interest in the present and future of Indian agriculture. The momentum for reforms should not be lost. ■

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By
**ARVIND
P. DATAR**

JUDICIARY

FUTURE TRENDS 2022

ORDER IN THE COURTS

THE JUDICIARY'S IMMEDIATE CHALLENGES INCLUDE REDUCING THE HUGE BACKLOG OF CASES IN THE LOWER COURTS, FILLING UP JUDGE VACANCIES AND STREAMLINING THE WORK OF TRIBUNALS. A LARGER CONCERN IS JUDICIAL INDEPENDENCE ITSELF

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s we hurtle towards the 75th year of our independence, a clear road-map is necessary to ensure that the judicial branch of our republican Constitution—which includes courts and the tribunals—functions efficiently and independently. At present, India is ranked 163rd among 193 countries in terms of enforcement of contracts and there can be no better wake-up call. We can accomplish the goal of becoming become a five-trillion dollar economy much faster if we pay greater attention to the neglected third pillar of our democracy. In 2022, the three areas which require immediate attention are: case arrears, judicial appointments and functioning of tribunals.

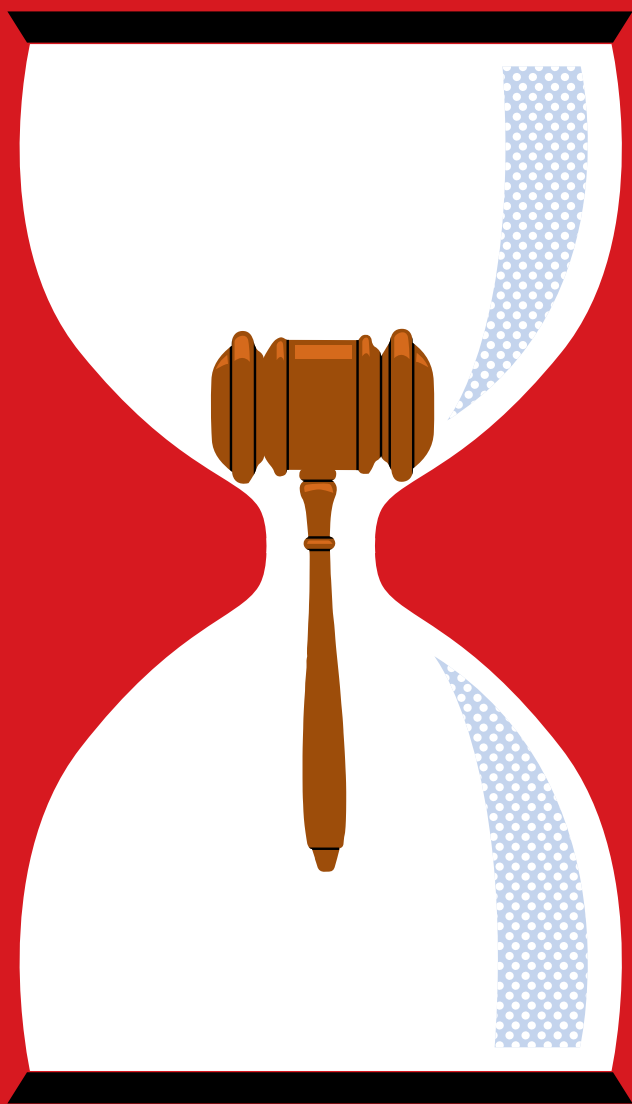
THE BACKLOG

As we bid goodbye to 2021, 5,638,327 cases remain pending in the high courts (4,080,659 civil and 1,557,668 criminal cases). About 53 per cent of these cases have been pending for more than three years, including the 940,513 cases that have been dragging on for over a decade. It is interesting that out of the 22 high courts, just five account for more than half the arrears (*see box*: Great Indian case logjam).

The nature of pending cases is completely different in the different high courts. While Bombay has a huge backlog of commercial cases, Allahabad has to focus on disposing criminal cases that account for 48 per cent of its arrears; in contrast, this figure is just 11 per cent in the Madras High Court which, strangely, has the highest backlog of civil cases in the country. Each high court thus needs a tailor-made plan to reduce the backlog. The simple application of Pareto's principle will show that 80 per cent of the cases in any category will come up from 20 per cent of a sub-category. Identifying the major sources of arrears and grouping of cases will significantly help to clear the logjam. It is equally necessary to apply management principles like Kaizen and marginal gains to increase the disposal of cases with the existing resources. Similarly, the pendency at the district level is equally a matter of concern with just five states accounting for 56 per cent of the arrears of 40.4 million cases.

A closer look at the data shows that while civil cases predominate in the high courts, a staggeringly disproportionate number of criminal cases flood the district and magistrate courts. This also indicates that the poorest amongst us languish as undertrials for lack of money and for lack of adequate number of judges.

In the lower courts, the experiment of creating fast-track courts and special



**A STAGGERINGLY DISPROPORTIONATE
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courts has done little to expedite disposal of cases, so newer methods must be devised. A time-work study by the Daksh Centre of Excellence for Law and Technology with a few magistrates and civil courts in Karnataka showed that 52 per cent of the time of a criminal judge and 48 per cent of a civil judge was spent in calling and adjourning cases. If this administrative work is given to a panel of retired magistrates, the trial courts can focus on the actual disposal of cases and instantly double their productivity. It is equally important to check the inflow of cases. Simple amendments that make the grant of bail automatic and simpler will drastically reduce the clogging of criminal courts and the high courts. Stringent bail conditions have failed to reduce crime and vastly increased corruption. It is also necessary to rethink whether the dishonour of a cheque should continue to be a crime.

JUDICIAL APPOINTMENTS

Out of a sanctioned strength of 1,098 high court judges, 402 posts remain vacant, the situation being particularly dire in some courts. The badly drafted provisions to create the National Judicial Appointments Commission were rightly struck down as they would have been unworkable. Till the Constitution is amended again, the current collegium system must continue. It is a myth that the executive has no say in judicial appointments. Article 224A of the Constitution enables retired judges to be appointed as ad hoc judges for a short term. There is no reason why this provision cannot be utilised and their expertise used to clear the backlog of cases that are over 10 years old.

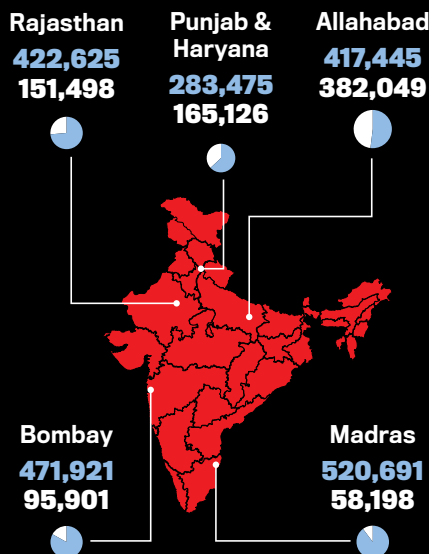
TRIBUNALS AND JUSTICE

The early 1990s saw the beginning of creating tribunals with the ostensible purpose of reducing the workload of the courts by providing specialised fora for faster disposal of cases. Apart from the traditional tax tribunals, banking, service law, company law, patents, trademark and a host of other areas came to be adjudicated by tribunals.

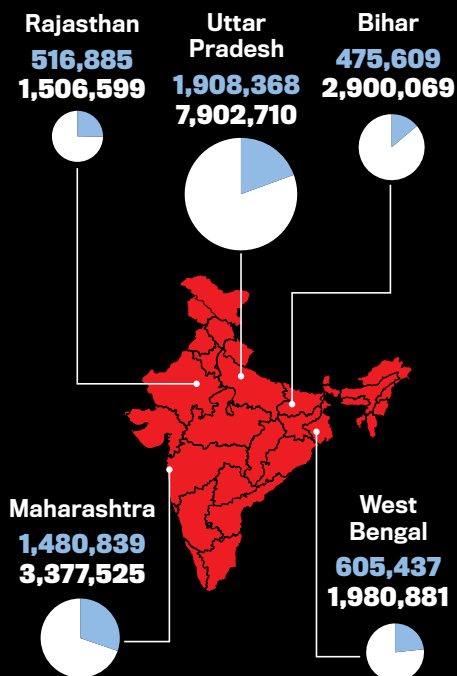
THE GREAT INDIAN CASE LOGJAM

● Pending civil cases ● Criminal cases

HIGH COURTS



DISTRICT COURTS



Graphic by TANMOY CHAKRABORTY

This experiment has miserably failed and requires urgent course correction. The present model of manning tribunals with retired judges and civil servants, who very often have no expert knowledge of the subject their tribunal deals with, has failed. The granting of limited tenure (five years), the absence of adequate infrastructure and lack of proper housing ensures that competent applicants seldom apply. The worst blow is that each tribunal is treated as a part of a ministry, rather than as an independent judicial tribunal. The hallmark of every tribunal in leading democracies is that they are as independent as courts of law. Sadly, the government does not realise that a robust and independent tribunal system will drastically improve India's image as a country where the rule of law prevails. The first and most important step is the creation of

a National Tribunals Commission as recommended by the Supreme Court.

Vacancies in the tribunals are even worse than at the high courts. For example, all the five benches of the Debt Recovery Appellate Tribunal in the country are vacant. There is not a single functioning Debt Recovery Tribunal in New Delhi and Chandigarh. It is the same lamentable story in almost all tribunals. The inevitable result is the backlog of cases in the tribunals as well. And the absence of a tribunal leaves a litigant with no choice but to approach the high courts, which further compounds the problem.

FORK IN THE ROAD

In the Federalist Papers (No. 78), Alexander Hamilton emphasised the necessity of complete judicial independence. He presciently remarked

that while liberty has nothing to fear from the judiciary alone, it has everything to fear from its union with either of the other departments. If we are to take our place as equals with the great western democracies, we must respect and nurture the institutional independence of our courts and tribunals. We have consistently neglected this area and each year's delay has deleterious consequences. Democracies that are intolerant or allergic to judicial independence have not only subverted the rule of law but stunted their economies as well—a lesson that we must learn from the path taken by Russia, Turkey and Poland. At the dawn of 2022, we are on a veritable fork in the road—which path to choose is our choice, the consequences thereafter are not. ■

Arvind P. Datar is a senior advocate



By
**Parag
Khanna**

MIGRATION

FUTURE TRENDS 2022

THE FUTURE IS BROWN-ISH

**THE INDIAN CAPACITY FOR ASSIMILATION
WILL PLAY A HUGE PART IN HOW AND WHY
INDIANS WILL SHAPE THE WORLD**

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The next wave of global Indian migrants may be much larger than what the world has experienced so far. With a much younger median age than China, India has 600 million youth under the age of 25. Already 3.1 million of the highly skilled foreign workers in OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries were born in India, far higher than China's 2.2 million. Given the post-Covid economic crash and the country's sinister levels of pollution, Indians are more motivated to leave the country than ever before. As India expands its universities, even more Indians will qualify for graduate degrees in the US, Europe, Australia, Japan, and Singapore. Chinese students presently outnumber Indians on Western campuses, but the runway for India to catch up is long. Furthermore, Indians do not face the suspicions Chinese do. With their combination of English language, technical education and strategically

non-threatening identity, Indians are welcome everywhere, especially where Chinese no longer are.

The Indian capacity for assimilation is another crucial factor since being an Indian from an English-speaking country that is a former British colony is very different from being a Chinese, who is a citizen of a country that wasn't colonised by the British and has its own insular culture. When I was growing up and moved to the US, I could speak only Hindi. When I started learning English, it was as a first language. The Japanese, Korean and Vietnamese kids in New York were learning it as a second language. I learnt quickly and assimilated. It is this kind of assimilation that leads to cultural acceptance and is a huge reason for why the Indian diaspora is much bigger than the Chinese diaspora.

Ten years ago, we weren't talking about China as a country considered hostile by the entire world. It was a potentially benevolent, infrastructure-focused, trade-related super-

power and not a nefarious, exploitative, near mercantile and rapacious empire bent on global domination with no respect for anyone else. Now China is seen as basically evil just about everywhere.

We are having this conversation at a time when most nations would prefer not to have a lot of Chinese people. Look what is happening in the US and Britain—the coordinated suspicion of Chinese scientists, scaring away of Chinese scientists and students. Now this intersects with another conversation—on labour shortages. This is becoming worse at a time when the Asian population is growing and while the Chinese are being rejected for geopolitical reasons and on grounds

sion a Chinese Satya Nadella or Parag Aggarwal? And It's not just that Indians speak English but that India is producing a huge surplus of those who study IT or medicine. These are the two largest areas of labour shortages in the whole world.

Women are another big factor. In my book, I write: "A female Indian IT professional is surely the least threatening immigrant in the world". What could you possibly find wrong with her that you don't want her in your country? She is only going to add value. She will boost your GDP, she will rent an apartment, make friends, she will never be a criminal. It may seem culturally insensitive, but it is true. The fact is that the world

IT'S NOT JUST THAT INDIANS SPEAK ENGLISH BUT THAT INDIA IS PRODUCING A HUGE SURPLUS OF THOSE WHO STUDY MEDICINE OR IT

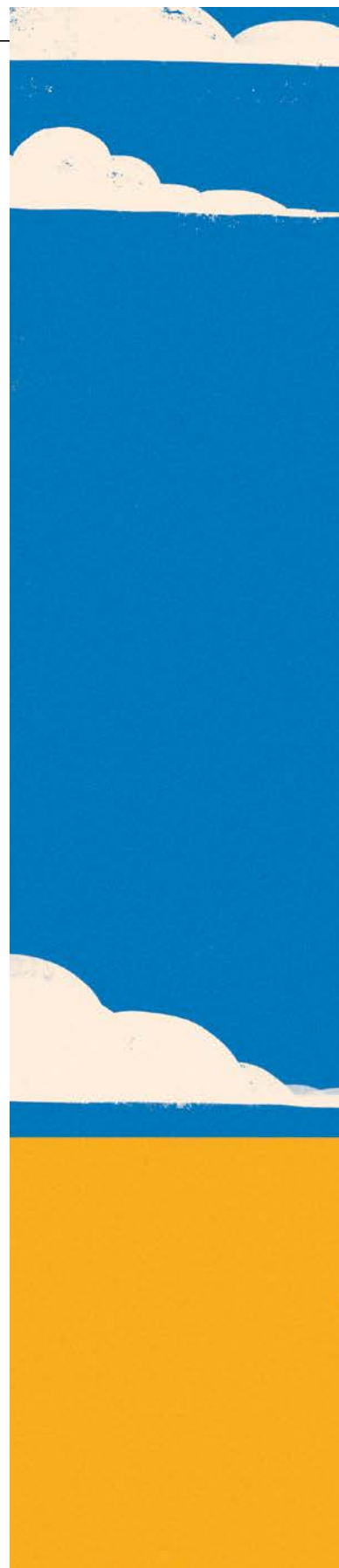
of suspicion and espionage, one still has to fill those shortages. So, boom come the young Indians, precisely when you are desperate to counter labour shortages. I went to the headquarters of SAP, the largest European software company, in Frankfurt, and what did I see? Lots of Indians. I don't remember seeing Indians in Germany during the time I was in high school. Now there is a whole city of Indians powering entire European regions.

We are accustomed to that in the US. We know Indians run the big tech companies. And this not temporary. Age, geopolitical factors, the history of Indians' presence across the world have resulted in an Indian diaspora that is embedded globally, while the Chinese diaspora remains largely in Asia. This is structural and not cyclical. The Chinese are not suddenly going to go through a cycle of learning English and assimilating. It is not a viable scenario. Can you ever envi-

will embrace Indian women.

Another factor is climate change. It will prod many Indians to relocate, initially within India and then become another reason for them to move abroad. Middle class Indians are buying property in the UAE. Recently, almost 600,000 Indians gave up their citizenship to move to other countries. When an Indian joins the middle class and can afford to move to another country, there is a good chance they will.

As a sub point, India faces a deficit of opportunities versus the number of people seeking opportunities. If you are talented and want to stay in India, there will be jobs for you in tech companies. Why should Microsoft hire someone in Seattle who is mediocre and pay him \$250,000 when the same job can be done by a tech professional in India for \$50,000. If you are talented, then India is not only a land of opportunity but a



CLIMATE CHANGE WILL PRODUCE MANY INDIANS TO RELOCATE, WITHIN INDIA AND THEN BECOME ANOTHER REASON FOR THEM TO MOVE ABROAD

geographical node of global opportunity. In the future, we will see Indians all over Central Asia, Russia, Western Europe and even more in Africa.

The Central Asians are scared out of their wits by the Chinese but they love Bollywood music, they love Indians because the Soviets loved India. Our affinity with these countries is part of our geopolitical history. Central Asia will become one, it will thrive, bringing people in from IT, medicine and agriculture. Russia will import Indian farmers and Asian Europeans will be a whole new generation of millions of Indians growing up in Europe because they are born there. This will be one of the largest growing diasporas in the world. No place in the world has greater labour shortages than Europe, and since Europeans don't like Arabs and Africans, Indians will find opportunities there to thrive. Despite everything we read about racism in Europe, this is happening. Assimilation may seem like a vicious contest, but fusion prevails in the end. Our destiny is to be a global mongrel civilisation. ■

(As told to Shweta Punj)

Parag Khanna is founder of FutureMap and author of MOVE: How Mass Migration Will Reshape the World



By **SHARDA
UGRA**

SPORTS

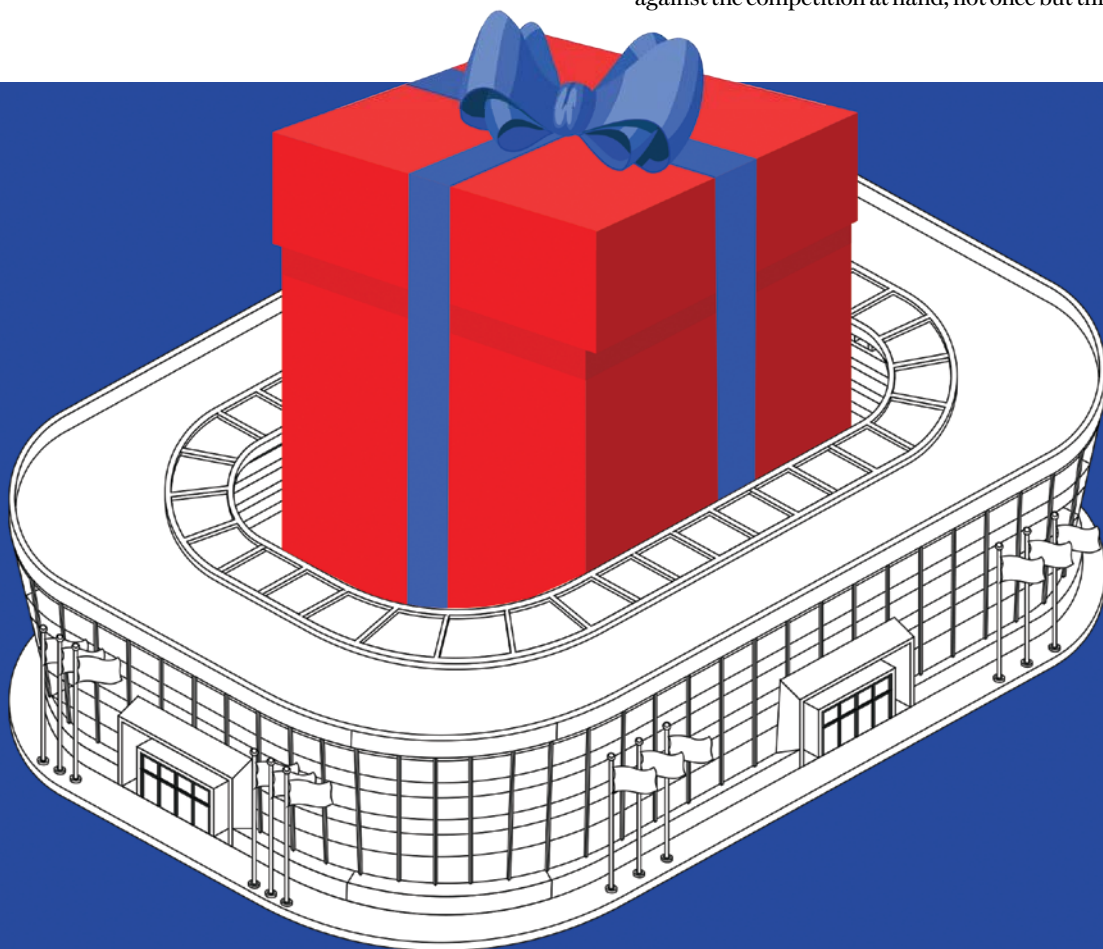
ROOTING FOR TEAM INDIA

**THE YEAR 2022 WILL AFFORD ALL
INDIAN SPORTSPERSONS THE
OPPORTUNITY TO EITHER PROVE
THEMSELVES OR REINVENT THE
SPORT ITSELF**

T

To see the big picture of what is in store across Indian sport in 2022, let's turn to our alpha male. Not Virat Kohli, Neeraj Chopra. Olympic gold medallist, javelin-flinging stereotype-buster, answer to our previously-unfulfilled dreams, Chopra's 2022 is going to be, like for Indian sport, a year of living breathlessly. Omicron or not, in 2022, Chopra undertakes the biggest test of his life—to establish whether Tokyo was a starting point or rest house. In July 2022, Chopra will compete in his first-ever senior World Athletics Championships, as the world's No.4 javelin thrower. The three ahead of him will be itching to re-stomp their superiority over the Indian who, operating in what can only be called a Zone of Zen, toppled carts and ranking charts in Tokyo.

For Chopra, 2022 carries peak pressure and also peaking pressure. He must find his best physical groove against the competition at hand, not once but three times



in a year. After the Worlds, within 60 days, Chopra will defend the two other international titles he holds, as the Commonwealth Games (CWG) and Asian Games (AG) champion. He had the option to peak at the Worlds and then opt out of at least one of the other big Games, but chose not to. "I am an athlete, my job is to work," he said to me, even when awash in his celebratory post-Tokyo cascade.

What 2022 expects of that work is Neeraj 2.2—an updated, improved version of himself. By beating his personal best (88.07 metre), scaling the elusive 90 metre mark and going mano a mano with his sport's current giant Johannes Vetter, who crosses 90 metres like jaywalkers do streets. Chopra stepped off the conveyor belt of felicitations as late as the first week of December, leaving India for the sanity of a training base overseas. He is now in the US. And while 2022 may be a hell of a stretch, flexibility happens to be one of his biggest strengths.

For all our athletes across sports,

medal binges are no longer possible as the sport itself has been erased from the CWG programme. The AG offer far tougher fields and will be followed by the World Shooting Championships. The place occupied by shooting, the country's pre-eminent sport (outside of cricket), has been emphatically replaced by Chopra, badminton and hockey. It is why 2022 is shooting's opportunity to regain lost ground and goodwill.

The year offers a renewed focus on another sport, football, with the staging of two major events—the AFC Women's Asian Cup and FIFA u-17 women's football world cup. Removed from the hoopla, our football's preference for its top-down, big-event governance needs ruthless scrutiny. Their gossamer model bypasses the need to see working boots into the grassroots offering millions of boys and girls competitive, local, state and national leagues over the decoy of 'exposure' and 'prep' tours for a few dozen elite players picked for a showpiece event.

Over the year, the ascent of Odisha

seater hockey stadium being built in Rourkela for the Hockey World Cup that will be staged there in January 2023.

Finally, front and centre, occupying the top of the mind is the great gorilla—cricket. In 2022, a churn is going to come, with a 10-team IPL set in motion. The IPL's 15th season will mark the next phase of its reinvention, both in the national men's team and its imprint on the global calendar. Trends indicate the men's team will be split into two clear components—red ball and white ball squads—under different captains. It won't be the first time India will have had two captains for separate formats, but this time will be a hard-nosed cleaving. In the past, the Kumble-Dhoni or Dhoni-Kohli formula was merely a stop-gap until one was given all three jobs.

Kohli, 33, is in the latter half of his career and trying to re-discover his batting mojo with some parts of his captaincy portfolio expendable. India's tri-format players and, by extension, captaincy candidates at the moment are only a handful: Rohit Sharma, 34, Mohammed Shami 31, K.L. Rahul 29, Jasprit Bumrah 28 and Rishabh Pant, 24. The new year will bring yet another piece of ICC silverware for the taking in the ICC Men's T20 World Cup in Australia. Kohli has ensured it will not be his captaincy cross to bear and whoever is chosen will write the team's future script.

But much before IPL begins, there is more disruption due in the first quarter of 2022: in case the UAE cricket's six-team, 34-match T20 league gets off the ground. The Glaziers of Manchester United have confirmed their franchise acquisition with UAE cricket and at least two Indian T20 franchises have indicated interest in fielding teams—the already multi-national Knight Riders and the Reliance-owned behemoths Mumbai Indians. Should both get involved, well, that will change everything. ■

Sharda Ugra is a senior sports journalist who has been working across print and digital media for over three decades

MEMORIES OF TOKYO ARE FRESH, SO SLACKING OFF IS NOT AN OPTION. THOSE WHO CAME THROUGH SHINING, WILL BE CALLED OUT FOR HIDING BEHIND ITS LUSTRE

2022 demands rebooting, revival and resurgence at a rapid pace they will not be used to. In a pre-Covid age, the 12 months after an Olympics was usually a gap year, when they took a breath, re-oriented plans, sort out kinks in fitness before the push for the CWG-AG double blast. Except a delayed Olympics nixed the gap year and set everything on turbo.

Memories of Tokyo are fresh, so slacking off is not an option: those who came through shining, will get called out for continuing to hide behind its lustre. For those who didn't quite cut it at the Olympics, 2022 can stoke belief again. Particularly the shooters whose CWG

as the new hub for Indian sport (again, outside cricket) will only be confirmed. In a March 2021 Grant Thornton survey of Sports Cities of India, Bhubaneswar was No. 3 behind Delhi and Mumbai and was followed by Bengaluru and Ahmedabad. The published survey somehow featured Bhubaneswar at No.4, behind Ahmedabad and Bengaluru, but typos aside, Odisha's sporting profile has displaced other sporting strongholds. The state putting its money where its mouth is, in the case of sponsorships of national hockey teams, did not go unnoticed either following the successes of the hockey campaigns in Tokyo. There's a 20,000

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WINNING THE RACE

IN HIS RECENTLY
RELEASED MEMOIR,
KAL PENN TELLS
THE STORY OF
HOW HE BROKE
HOLLYWOOD'S
DIVERSITY CEILING

W

When Kal Penn was in high school, his guidance counsellor, Mrs Cummings, called him to her office to discuss his future. Though still in his teens, Penn had a plan. He wanted to be an actor and filmmaker. Once his career got going, he also wanted to do something civic-minded—development or non-profit work. Mrs Cumming's advice was both a little condescending and clichéd: "You can't have your cake and eat it, too." The title of Penn's memoir, *You Can't Be Serious*, as also its witty, disarming content, seem, in many ways, to be Penn's response to his counsellor. "I will say I have no malice towards her."

Speaking to INDIA TODAY over Zoom from his Los Angeles home, Penn, 44, says, "There are tons of kids like me, even today, who have guidance counsellors like that. And I hope that when they read my story, the story of my films—*Harold & Kumar*, *The Namesake*—they see that the way to deal with somebody who is simply discouraging you, is to still try and go after all that you have so badly wanted."

Going after what he wanted, though, was never easy for Penn. His account

of his early acting days, for instance, is both a lesson in perseverance and a repudiation of discrimination. "Before auditioning, I would prepare a whole series of backstories for a character, only to walk in and have somebody go, 'Where's your turban?'" At one point, a potential manager even turned him down, saying, "Somebody who looks like you is never going to work in Hollywood." Rather than despair, Penn relied on his pluck. Once he changed his name from Kalpen Modi

character they could finally find themselves in.

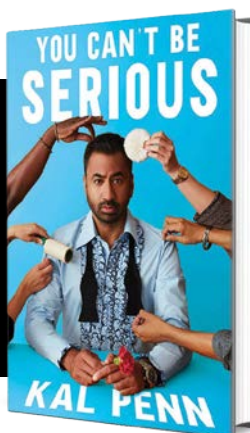
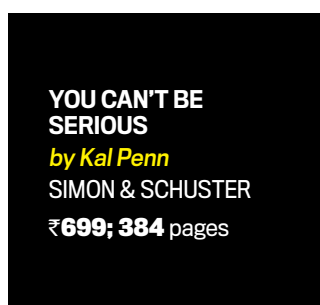
According to Penn, technology, and the advent of OTT platforms, in particular, have together helped transform the diversity and representation debate. "I don't think I could have dreamed that I would turn on Netflix and see so many talented brown writers, producers, actors and musicians. Hasan Minhaj is selling out stadiums across the US. Priyanka Chopra was in *The Matrix*. Mindy Kaling is producing

disobedience, I realised my grandfather's scar was a symbol of him standing up for our human rights."

The courage which Penn inherited from his grandparents, perhaps, manifested itself most obviously when he decided to take a two-year sabbatical from acting to join the Obama administration. In the chapters that Penn dedicates to campaigning duties and governmental work, one finds inspiration and also, at times, a 'lightness' that seems missing from politics today. "I have been humbled by President Obama several times, but it was very special to have the chance to put together the first ever Diwali at the White House for him. We wanted to put all faiths together on one platform and celebrate light overcoming darkness. The idea was never to simply make a bunch of some Indians happy," Penn says.

Though *You Can't Be Serious* is first "a book about how your life can have more than one story professionally", it does hit some wonderfully resonant notes when it's personal. Penn describes his relationships with his parents and his fiancé Josh with a novel, often humorous, warmth. When asked if he was surprised by the 'coming out' headlines that followed the release of his book, Penn said, "The chapters about Josh and my parents were, strangely, easy to write. Other bits were more blood, sweat and tears. People, of course, will identify with the stories they choose. I was happy to share them all." ■

—Shreevatsa Nevatia



to Kal Penn, jobs, surely enough, started trickling in.

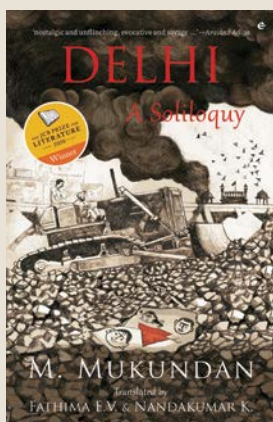
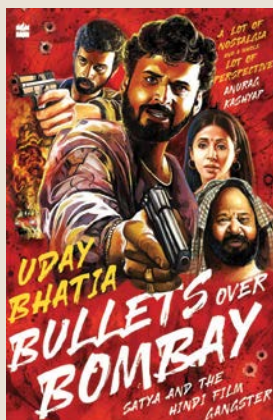
Penn's several successes during his 25-year acting career have never quite been his alone. Released in 2004, it was *Harold & Kumar Go to White Castle*, a stoner comedy, that made Penn a star, but it also seemed to give a grossly under-represented South Asian diaspora some much-needed pop culture visibility. Penn's portrayal of Gogol in Mira Nair's *The Namesake* (2006) did endear him to Indian audiences, but it also gave young Indian Americans a

three shows. Lilly Singh was the first woman to host a Late Night show. It is all so exciting!"

Penn says his feet have always been in two worlds. Growing up, he heard his grandparents tell him stories about how they each marched with Gandhi. There is a moving scene in the book where his grandfather shows Penn a scar on his leg he got from a beating by colonial policemen.

"In high school, when I read about the American civil rights movement, the idea of non-violent civil

BOOKMARKING 2021



From the return of big names to Covid becoming a literary protagonist, 2021 had something for us all

Last year's most anticipated publishing event was perhaps the unveiling of Sally Rooney's latest novel. *Beautiful World, Where Are You* joined a roster of old heavyweights returning with new work: Maggie Nelson, Colm Tóibín, Jhumpa Lahiri and Salman Rushdie. South Africa's Damon Galgut picked up the Booker, fiction's top honour, for *The Promise*, his decades-long multi-generational story of a white family during and after apartheid.

The Baillie Gifford, non-fiction's big prize went to *Empire of Pain* on the Sackler dynasty and the American opioid crisis by the *New Yorker*'s Patrick Radden Keefe. The Women's Prize for Fiction found itself in a spot of bother when some women condemned the longlisting of a transwoman (Torey Peters). Her excellent debut novel, *Detransition, Baby*, eventually lost to Susanna Clark's *Piranesi*. In South Asia, the Rs 25 lakh JCB Prize went to M. Mukundan's Malayalam novel *Delhi: A Soliloquy*.

Indian non-fiction showed its bench strength across formats. Examinations of pop culture and sociological phenomena flourished by way of *Bullets over Bombay* (Uday Bhatia) and *Desperately Seeking Shah Rukh* (Shrayana Bhattacharya). Sonia Faleiro's *Good Girls* was a masterful work of journalism, unpacking a hanging in Uttar Pradesh, while other accomplished women journalists with books out in 2021 included Rukmini S.'s deep data dive (*Whole Numbers and Half Truths*) and Kavitha Iyer's dogged reporting on the agrarian crisis (*Landscapes of Loss*).

As the virus mutated, it became a bona fide literary trope, giving us the beginnings of a recognisable subgenre—pandemic fic-



INCISIVE WRITING
(clockwise from left) Damon Galgut, Sonia Faleiro and Jhumpa Lahiri

tion. Sarah Hall's *Burntcoat* explored lovers caught in lockdown, Gary Shteyngart's *Our Country Friends* brought us pals riding out the pandemic in a rural retreat. Jodi Picoult, in *Wish You Were Here*, crafted a thriller around the Covid-induced claustrophobia. In India, Puja Changoiwala's *Homebound* plunged into the migrant exodus through the voice of a teenager and Namita Gokhale acknowledged the pandemic in her family saga, *Blind Matriarch*.

Doom and gloom generally mean a murder mystery boom. Big names returned with mysteries of the cosy, English (Anthony Horowitz) and twisty, thrilling (Paula Hawkins) varieties. Rijula Das won a Tata Book Award with *A Death in Shonagachhi* and *Murder at the Mushaira* by Raza Mir brought us a mysterious death against the backdrop of the 1857 rebellion. Senior crime journalists inserted authenticity into their maiden novelistic attempts, including Mohamed Thaver with *In Plain Sight*, a gripping police procedural, and Abhishek Sharan, who co-authored a counter-terror thriller, *Operation Trojan Horse*. ■

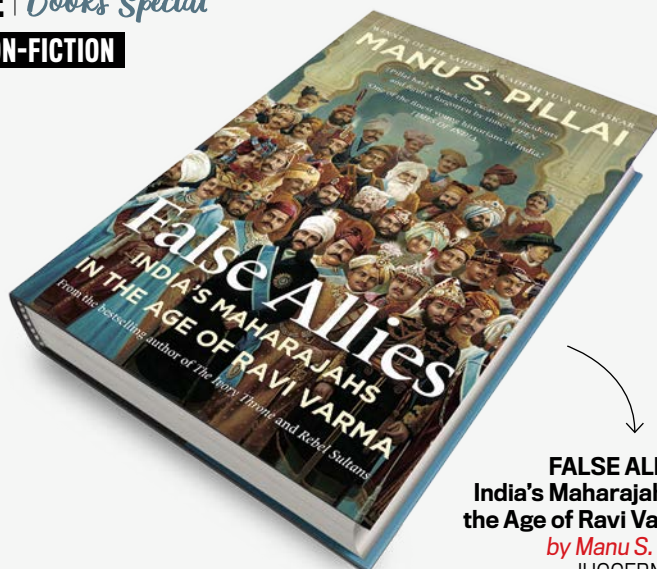
—Bhavya Dore

Indian writers showed their strength in various genres and the world saw the emergence of a new one—**PANDEMIC FICTION**



GAME OF THRONES

Manu S. Pillai throws light on the oft-ignored histories of India's princely states in *False Allies*



FALSE ALLIES
India's Maharajahs in
the Age of Ravi Varma
by **Manu S. Pillai**
JUGGERNAUT
₹899; 528 pages

H

HISTORIES OF BRITISH

rule in India, especially textbooks, often focus on areas which were directly administered—presidencies and provinces—ignoring the huge number of princely or 'native' states that were ruled indirectly. This represents a major absence as the over 550 states which constituted princely India, together accounted for nearly two-fifths of the territory of the Indian empire. Until quite recently, published research on princely states was woefully inadequate. However, there is now a sizeable body of scholarly studies on the subject, though these are mostly monographs or articles of a specialised nature. Manu S. Pillai has produced an accessible and well-researched book largely based on this literature to tell us the story of these political entities.

Given the sheer number,

as well as the enormous diversity of states in terms of size, geography and histories of their respective relationships with the British, it is no easy task to pen an account that would be sufficiently comprehensive to give the reader a good idea about this diversity and, at the same time, rich in the kind of fascinating detail which makes for an absorbing narrative. Pillai performs this feat adroitly, selecting five princely states: Travancore, Baroda, Mysore, Pudukkottai and, somewhat unexpectedly, Mewar, which has not received much attention in the context of the modern period. What connects them

Given the vast number and diversity of princely states, writing a comprehensive account was no easy task, but Manu S. Pillai has done it expertly

is the oeuvre of Ravi Varma.

Ravi Varma was a product of opportunities provided by the moderately cosmopolitan milieu of Travancore, a cosmopolitanism which of course should not be exaggerated. Travancore was fortunate to have several talented administrators occupying the position of Diwan (principal bureaucrat), two of whom, Madhava Rao and Seshiah Sastri, are central to the narrative. Similarly, Mysore benefited from the presence of the great Visvesvaraya.

It is generally recognised that Baroda, Mysore and Travancore were the three most 'modern' princely states. They all had an impressive record in areas like education and industry. On the other hand, Mewar remained a backwater, notwithstanding the preeminent status of its ruling dynasty in colonial Rajasthan. The British upheld this status, influenced by James Tod's glorification of the Mewar Sisodias. They were reluctant to intervene in the affairs of

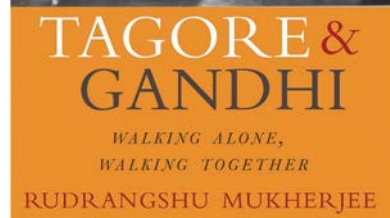
the state as they routinely did in the case of most other states. Eventually pressures from below, culminating in widespread discontent in the 1920s, forced the colonial establishment to abridge the authority of the incumbent ruler Fateh Singh (r.1884-1930). The splendid illustrations which accompany the main text of *False Allies* include Ravi Varma's portrait of the handsome and regal Fateh Singh: "To those prone to romance, here was a living embodiment of all that was glorified in Rajputs" (p.321).

The book clearly demonstrates that colonialism had a stifling effect, and British meddling undermined possibilities of progress even in the most advanced states such as Baroda and Mysore. Thus, Sayaji Rao of Baroda (r.1875-1939), the most energetic among modernising princes, had to tone down his dynamism in later years to ensure that he continued to be on the throne. So much for the claim that British rule was about progress. ■

—Amar Farooqui

THE POET WRITES TO THE SAINT

By revisiting the correspondence of Gandhi and Tagore, historian **Rudrangshu Mukherjee** helps reveal aspects of their personalities we don't usually see



TAGORE & GANDHI
Walking Alone, Walking Together
by Rudrangshu Mukherjee
ALEPH
₹699; 208 pages

T

Mukherjee, for this wonderful session, mind-boggling one as if listening to Aesop's fables." He meant, of course, that it was as engaging, not that it was fiction. There would be no historiography if the past could be accurately reproduced; it is only because all that happens becomes irretrievable past instantly and can no longer be verified that the discipline of history emerges as recall. But there is a limit to the minds that can be applied to history, the eyes that read it, and the means of recording it. Hence there is more historical writing on those who distinguish themselves in some way or other. Amongst Indians, Rabindranath Tagore is the most distinguished litterateur and Gandhi the most distinguished politician in recent times. The connection between them is peripheral: each had his own background, training and mission. Mukherjee, who has returned to history after a distinguished journalistic career, delves into it.

Gandhi wrote, "The Poet is an inventor—he creates, destroys and recreates. I am an explorer and having discovered a thing I must cling to it." This was a polite description: actually, Gandhi is known as a passionate rebel against British colonial rule, though there was another side to him—a campaigner for narrow nationalism who wanted to protect India from the post-

his book emerged from lectures in Ashoka University, whose vice-chancellor, till four years ago, was Rudrangshu Mukherjee. One of his students wrote: "Thank you, Prof.

industrial ills of the West and turn it back into a rural economy—not quite the preindustrial one, for he also wanted to replace feudalism with cooperative egalitarianism. Tagore was a cosmopolitan who wanted to invite global cultures into India and create a new universal culture, of which his Visva-Bharati would be a pioneer. Both failed; India became a formal British-style democracy infected with autocratic Hindu nationalism, while Visva-Bharati became a largely conventional, none-too-great university. That is another story. This book covers the intellectual debate between them, carried out in personal meetings, correspondence as well as public writings.

Although they met only occasionally, Gandhi had tremendous respect for Tagore; he would often ask Tagore for his opinion on something that he was thinking of doing. Tagore would give him a frank response—on a satyagraha, for instance. They disagreed sometimes—for instance, on whether the 1934 Bihar earthquake was a product of divine will. They lived before the cellphone age, so their exchanges were recorded on paper—not necessarily by themselves, but also by intermediaries such as Charles Andrews and Mahadev Desai.

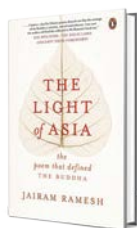
Thus, this book is a decades-long, complicated conversation; but more importantly, it is a record of the thought processes of Gandhi, who indefatigably made propaganda but did not generally disclose his inner reflections, and Tagore, who carried a heavy burden of artistic creation and institutional administration. It discloses a generally hidden side of both. Mukherjee found a niche, and he has illuminated it well. ■

—Ashok V. Desai

MY BEST OF 2021

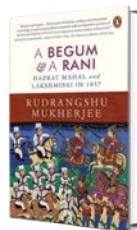


GOPALKRISHNA GANDHI
Former diplomat;
Author of Refuge



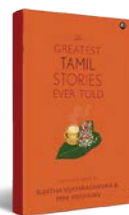
THE LIGHT OF ASIA
The Poem that Defined the Buddha
by Jairam Ramesh
PENGUIN; ₹799; 448 pages

Ramesh's biography is of poet Edwin Arnold and his poem's subject, Buddha. Both glow in this marvel of archival excavation and narrative mastery.



A BEGUM & A RANI
Hazrat Mahal & Lakshmibai in 1857
by Rudrangshu Mukherjee
PENGUIN ALLEN LANE
₹699; 256 pages

Mukherjee vivifies the lives of two amazing women, one of who is justly famous and the other unjustly forgotten in the saga of India's transition from servility to defiance.



THE GREATEST TAMIL STORIES EVER TOLD
by Sujatha Vijayaraghavan & Mini Krishnan (editors)
ALEPH
₹699; 312 pages

These 30 stories hold the Tamil world like a beeda does its areca and coconut filings, pinned by the 'clove' of a great translation's astrigent succulence.

SPACE-TIME CONTINUUM

THE STORIES IN THIS SCI-FI ANTHOLOGY MIGHT BE SET IN THE FUTURE, BUT THEIR ROOTS ARE IN THE HERE AND NOW

First, a quibble: why on earth is the type so small? A book this ambitious, surely deserves a larger font size. Because, once you're over that particular hurdle, this is a rewarding volume.

I'm not a habitual reader of science fiction. Still, this collection spoke to me, and its major strength is tied root and branch to its ambition. This is not an 'Indian' collection. It is truly South Asian and deserves all the flowers it will surely get for bringing those disparate flavours together. If the speculative worlds of authors are rooted in the 'realities' they inhabit, then surely casting the net wide can only be a good thing. Nor are all these South Asians currently

residing in their lands of origin. To me, the bios at the end were just as interesting as the stories themselves.

The editor, Tarun Saint, is to be commended for his curation. He front-loads a couple of strong stories: 'And Now His Lordship is Laughing' by Shiv Ramdas and 'The Traveller' by Tashan Mehta lay down strong markers. The middle doesn't sag, either: 'A Different Sea' by Vandana Singh and 'The List' by Gautam Bhatia are standouts. But it is at the end, where a reader's interest might flag, that this collection truly shines. Usman Malik's 'Resurrection Points', a harrowing tale of religious strife and the dead being brought to life in Pakistan, gives way to 'Shambhala'

by Salik Shah, a meditation on childhood and exile against the backdrop of the Chinese occupation of Tibet, which in turn is followed by Yudhanyaja Wijeratne's 'Confessor', set in a black hole of a prison cell in a Sri Lanka that isn't of our time, but can only too easily be imagined. Saad Z. Hossain's brilliant 'Bring Your Own Spoon', set in Dhaka's ruined 'fringe' and featuring a vagrant chef and an insignificant djinn, is the perfect ending.

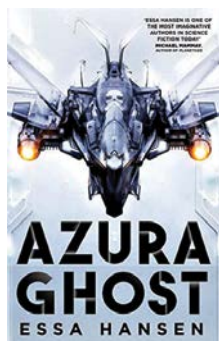
Dystopian, you say? Well, of course. Truth is stranger than fiction, we are told, and we only need to look around to see how immediate all these scenarios are. None of these authors shy away from the big themes: among other

MY
BEST
OF
2021



GAUTAM BHATIA

Author, *The Wall*



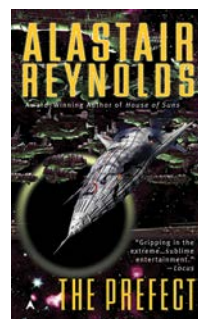
AZURA GHOST
by *Essa Hansen*

ORBIT

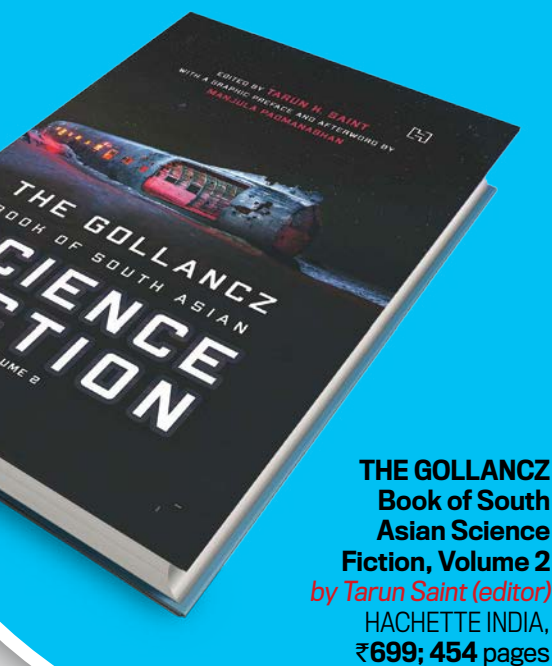
₹494 (KINDLE);
512 pages

The sequel to *Nophek Gloss*, *Azura Ghost* is due to be formally published in March 2022, and marks the continuation of one of the most innovative and original contemporary space operas available today. Hansen's "multiverse"—with its many species—is deeply visual, engagingly complex, and, like the best science fiction, sets up all the great questions without doing its readers the disservice of too-easy answers.

THE PREFECT
by *Alastair Reynolds*
ACE
₹900;
576 pages



Reynold's futuristic space opera, set around the many worlds of the 'Glitter Band', whose denizens all engage in a form of direct democracy to make decisions, often felt like a cross between the best of Iain M. Banks (in the moral stakes that it set up) and more recent science fiction detective stories, such as Emma Newman's *After Atlas*. Here is a rare work of science fiction that makes the practice of democracy one of its central plot points.

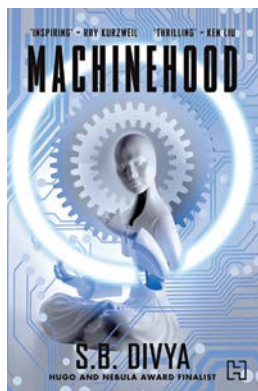


**THE GOLLANCZ
Book of South
Asian Science
Fiction, Volume 2**
by Tarun Saint (editor)
HACHETTE INDIA,
₹699; 454 pages

things, climate change, religious persecution, the increasing atomisation of our lives amid the galloping ubiquity of surveillance. Strikingly, few of these stories are in any way escapist. They are rooted in the here and now, no matter where the action may be taking place.

This is the great strength of this volume, finally. It sets up its stall in the future, or in a time that isn't our own. But the mirrors it holds up shows us the way things are now, or will very soon be. And it entertains us while doing so. ■

—Avtar Singh



MACHINEHOOD
by S.B. Divya
HACHETTE INDIA
₹499; 416 pages

S.B. Divya's near-future novel about a completely gig-ified economy, locked in debates around the rights of machines, had an eerie and familiar feel: as if we are just two steps away from the ambiguously dystopic world of the novel, and are almost sleepwalking into it. Another excellent science fiction book that sets up grand moral stakes without losing sight of the personal.

UNTIL PROVEN GUILTY

Abir Mukherjee's sixth novel in the Wyndham-Banerjee series sees him better already good form

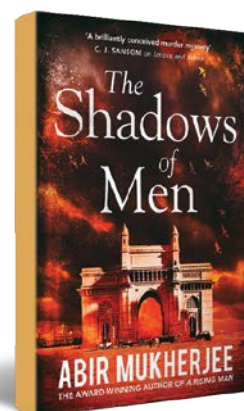
For those in the thrall of Captain Sam Wyndham and Sergeant Surendranath Banerjee of the colonial Calcutta police, the pair have returned to their familiar milieu, from Lal Bazar (their headquarters) to the backstreets of Calcutta and beyond. This time, however, in a truly ironic twist of fate, Sergeant Banerjee has been falsely accused of committing a murder while on a covert mission for none other than Calcutta's Police Commissioner Lord Taggart. Revealing any more of the events that unfold would result in a spoiler.

Suffice to say that once again Mukherjee's new book is deftly plotted, pays much heed to the prevailing politics of colonial India in the 1940s, and his characters are full-blooded and share many of the beliefs and prejudices of the time. Of course, colonial policing with all its hypocrisy is on full display, the close but nevertheless, inevitably fraught, relationship between Wyndham and Banerjee is adroitly portrayed and British perfidy in promoting and exploiting communal discord carefully woven into the narrative. Mukherjee also demonstrates his knowledge of the nationalist sentiments of the times and deftly uses them as a backdrop for the events in the novel.

This is his sixth novel in the Wyndham-Banerjee series and, arguably, his best since his 2019 thriller, *Smoke and Ashes*, set in Calcutta in the early 1920s. In some of the earlier novels, even as he sketched his two principal protagonists with care, the

plots were a bit contrived. For example, in his *A Necessary Evil*, despite a gripping start, the denouement veered into some stereotypical musings about Indian cultural and philosophical beliefs as one of the key characters held forth on both subjects. Consequently, the otherwise fascinating yarn that he had spun tended to unravel at the end.

No such loose ends mark this latest venture. Instead, it is tightly wound, with the narrative smoothly shifting between the two central characters; the reader is treated to insightful interior monologues in every vignette, and past episodes, as necessary, are appropriately recalled. Also, Mukherjee ably shifts locales between Calcutta and Bombay. He is familiar with



THE SHADOWS OF MEN
by Abir Mukherjee
HARVILL SECKER
₹699; 352 pages

the folkways and alleys of both cities, not to mention the social norms of various communities as well as their peculiar prejudices ranging from class to kin.

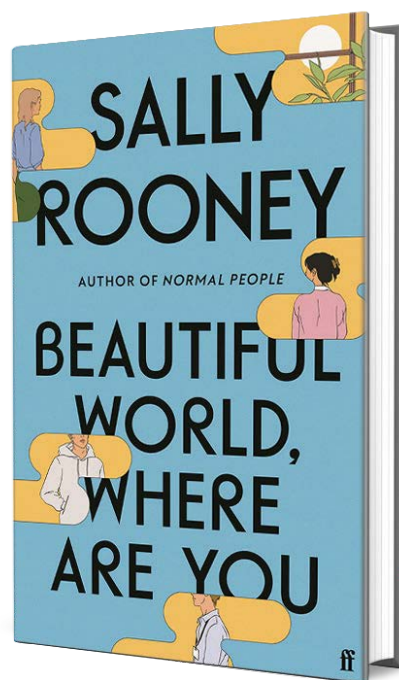
Without revealing any critical clues, it can be mentioned that the novel has a truly tantalising end. Indeed, the climax is bound to leave every Wyndham-Banerjee aficionado wondering about what will transpire next for this fascinating duo. ■

—Sumit Ganguly

BEAUTIFUL WORLD,
WHERE ARE YOU
by Sally Rooney
FABER & FABER
₹699; 352 pages

WE THAT ARE YOUNG

Much like the youth of her characters, **Sally Rooney's** latest novel is caught in a flux of becoming



S

ally Rooney is quite the figure of this particular time, a time when authors are also brands, and what they tweet about and look like can often not be set aside while reading their works. This is the affliction of reading Rooney—especially when one of her four central characters, Alice, seems to be based on herself. You see, Alice is a young, attractive woman and a celebrity author and she is grudgingly unhappy about all these things. She has also spent time at a psychiatric facility for what seems like professional burnout.

About half of this novel is epistolary, as Alice maintains email correspondence with her best friend Eileen. Although not exactly “beautiful”, their exchanges do have the languidness and intellectualisation of youth—the kind of emails you would write at a certain time in your life. “But it also strikes me that the idea of ‘conservatism’ is in itself false,

because nothing can be conserved, as such—time moves in one direction only, I mean. This idea is so basic that when I first thought of it, I felt very brilliant, and then I wondered if I was an idiot,” writes Alice. This precise sense of not quite knowing who you are and being in a constant state of becoming has been the hallmark of Brand Rooney.

The other half of this book describes Alice and Eileen’s lives, negotiating their jobs, social expectations and relationships with Felix and Simon, respectively. With the addition of these two outsiders to the women’s internal lives and private narratives, Rooney again has her opportunity to explore the criss-crossing gaps between people, society, reality and more. And while *Beautiful World, Where Are You* is an

absolutely stellar attempt at doing so—“...we are standing in the last lighted room before the darkness, bearing witness to something...” basically describes an entire zeitgeist in one line—it also seems to have a gap within itself where real feeling should be.

Alice also says at one point, “If novelists wrote honestly about their own lives, no one would read novels.” One, at times, wonders if this is Rooney’s ‘honest’ novel, the one where she sheds

the brand and is in her own state of becoming something else entirely. The future may remember *Beautiful World, Where Are You* as the transitory novel before Rooney finds her new true voice. This may not be Rooney’s best, but it proves her best is yet to come. ■

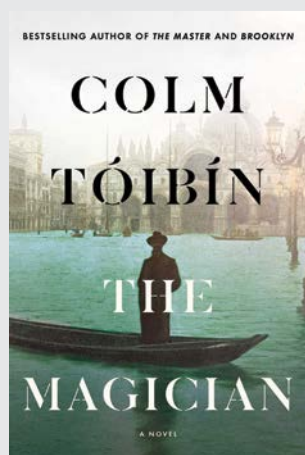
—Tanushri Shukla

Sally Rooney's
Beautiful World, Where Are You might be remembered as the transitory novel before she finds her new, true voice

MY BEST OF 2021



MIRZA WAHEED
Author,
Tell Her Everything



THE MAGICIAN
Colm Tóibín
SCRIBNER
₹2,100; 512 pages

One of the books of the year for me is Colm Tóibín's magnificent novel, *The Magician*, a fictionalised biography of Thomas Mann. Tóibín dramatises Mann's life and times in the most compelling fashion, giving us both a portrait of Mann the artist against the backdrop of 20th century Germany and that of a family man troubled by a lifelong struggle with his sexuality. It should be noted that Tóibín also draws a memorably vivid life sketch of Katia Mann. An epic novel.

INTERNATIONAL FICTION

You're flying a plane with 144 people on board, when you are told your family at home has been taken hostage. You have to choose: either crash a plane full of civilians and save your wife and two children, or save the plane and watch your family die. This is the dilemma thrust on Captain Bill Hoffman, a pilot with Coastal Airways when *Falling* opens. It's a promising premise and a turbo-charged read from debutant novelist and former flight attendant T.J. Newman.

Bill leaves home, after a cold exchange with his wife Carrie, to fly from LA to New York. Soon after take-off, he learns of his unthinkable Cornelian dilemma when the hostage-taker video calls him with his loved ones in captivity. Trying to alert anyone or asking for help could be calamitous, he is warned. But he manages to discreetly confide in his cabin colleague Jo, who then passes word along to her nephew Theo, an agent with the FBI.

The entire siege is being masterminded by Saman Khani, a disaffected Kurd with a political agenda. He hates Americans for destroying his homeland and family, and the crashed plane will be his big statement. The villain's origin story is interspersed in patches, and though the golden age of hijacking is

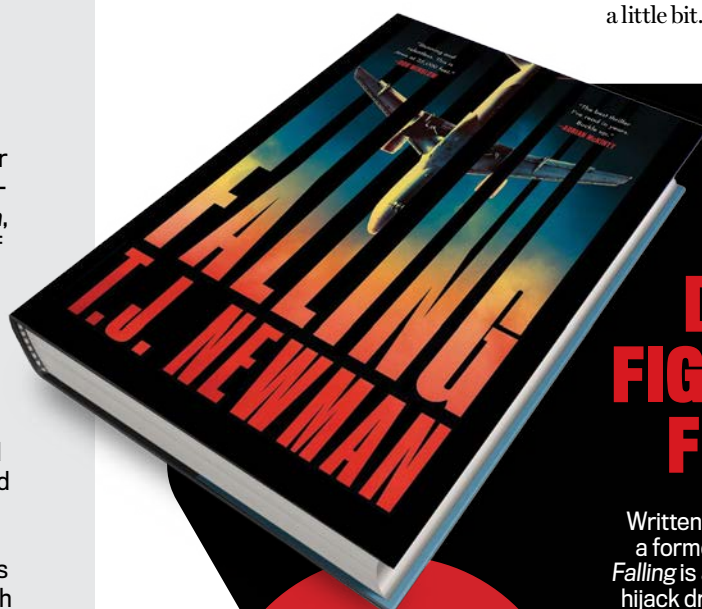
long behind us, the disgruntlement is instantly recognisable.

The novel rotates primarily through four perspectives; Bill, his wife Carrie, the flight attendant Jo, and agent Theo. Chapters alternate in short bursts between air-borne action and on-ground chases, almost ready-for-Hollywood in their brisk pacing and snappy dialogue.

Newman wrote the book on cross-country flights and her knowledge of planes and people who work them is her biggest strength. Tetchy passengers feature alongside intrepid cabin crew and a deep knowledge of aviation's nuts and bolts. Also featured are the nuts and bolts of any self-respecting thriller. On steroids. Poison gas, explosions, injuries, the military, rogue agents, a mole on board. Since it's the US, there's an all-important baseball game thrown in for good measure. And since it's 2021, there's also an Instagram influencer, who, well, let's say, has some influence in the crisis situation.

Newman found a literary agent on her 42nd attempt, and the book has gone on to crack bestseller lists. *Falling* asks for a few hours of your time and a suspension of your disbelief; the book is pure, propulsive, plotting. The seat belt sign is never switched off. Did I feel like standing up and singing the Stars Spangled Banner by the end? I'll admit, a little bit. ■

—Bhavya Dore



DON'T FIGHT THIS FLIGHT

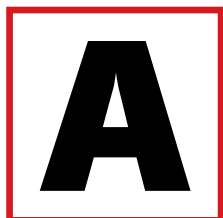
Written by **T.J. Newman**, a former flight attendant, *Falling* is a kind of blockbuster hijack drama that keeps you strapped in from the start

FALLING
by T.J. Newman
SIMON & SCHUSTER
₹599; 304 pages

DADDY DEAREST

THE NIZAM IN **ANEES SALIM'S** NOVEL HAS SO MANY CHILDREN THAT THEIR VOICES TOGETHER CREATE A POLYPHONY

LEISURE *Books Special*



Anees Salim's new novel is set between the day the Nizam did not die and the day on which he died. The era is one in which the Nizam is old, shrunken and powerless, but certainly not forgotten—the premature news of his death closes down shops and melts women into tears, before the city, half-embarrassed at its mistake, starts ticking again. The narrators are his children. Two of them are the acknowledged sons, and they live in the palace. The rest are the scattered progeny of nautch girls and others who have caught his eye or been procured for him at various times. There may be a dozen of them, or 149, or some number in between, but the Nizam has all their names down in a book.

Moazzam, the eldest, is the alcoholic heir to nothing in particular. He

soaks in the bathtub, contemplating the sparrows that perch on the edge of the tub, which seem to contemplate him in turn. Azam, his half-brother who lives in the palace, searches for that book in which his father has named all his children. The stammering Hyder also lives in the palace, but as a mere attendant to his comatose

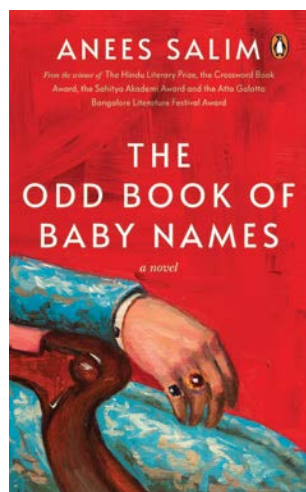
then dismissed for good.

The Nizam's other progeny speak from their various lowly positions. The tailor proud to craft the fez that sits on his royal father's head. The layabout who scrounges for an old fez to connect himself with the father who has forgotten him. The ghost of the half-brother he played with as a child. The sap who is a desperate voice on the phone, trying to claim the diamond the Nizam once promised him. And the chaiwallah's menial, who works for food and sleeps on a verandah, but knows that his mother was once sold for the night to the Nizam when the royal train halted in the middle of nowhere.

The city of Salim's creation is small, defined as in a fairy tale with a palace, a mosque, narrow lanes, a garden and a lake. The Nizam's children fill this sketchy landscape. In scenes that are painted more in water colours than in oils, their paths naturally cross and re-cross, with consequences that don't quite amount to tragedy. The novel exudes, rather, a wistful sorrow, the sorrow of souls in search of acknowledgement and belonging. ■

—Latha Anantharaman

**THE ODD BOOK OF
BABY NAMES**
by Anees Salim
PENGUIN
HAMISH
HAMILTON
₹599;
288 pages

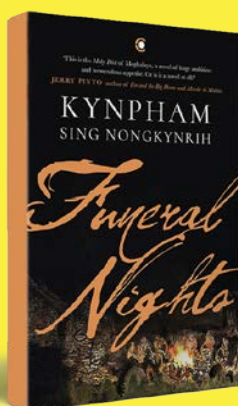


and flatulent father, ready to alert his betters when life has ceased to sputter in His Highness. Humera is special enough to be given birthday gifts from the palace till she turns 16. On that birthday she is invited to eat cake with her father and

MY BEST OF 2021

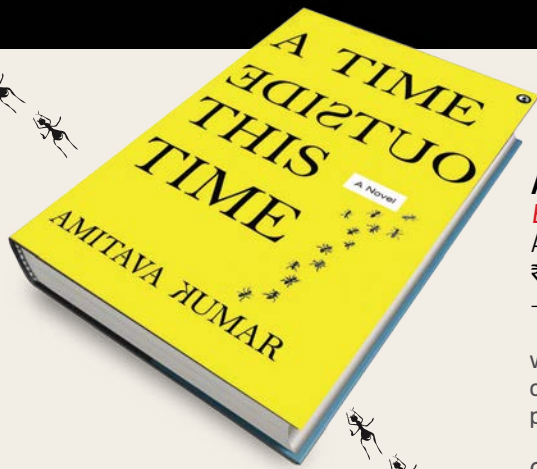


JERRY PINTO
Author; translator



FUNERAL NIGHTS
by Kynpham Sing
Nongkynrih
CONTEXT
₹899, 1,024 pages

The Moby-Dick of Meghalaya, this is a challenging read but ultimately rewarding. The term 'ambition' has become a cliché but this one genuinely has it, in spades. A group of friends set out for a funeral ritual and tell each other Canterburyesque tales along the way.



Sense of an Ending

EVEN AS AMITAVA KUMAR'S NOVEL ASKS IF FICTION HAS A ROLE TO PLAY IN OUR LIVES STILL, HIS WRITING SAYS YES

In Amitava Kumar's *A Time Outside This Time*, his 11th book, three engrossing stories are nestled in a meta-narrative of "writing about writing" during the current era of authoritarianism's anti-individualism and the Covid-19 pandemic's social distancing. And though the author has a different identity from the writer, it is clearly Kumar's alter-ego that is named Satya, given the book's preoccupations. Satya is at a creative getaway in Italy when Covid hits, searching for the answer to "Who among your neighbours

A TIME OUTSIDE THIS TIME

By **Amitava Kumar**
ALEPH BOOK COMPANY
₹699; 226 pages

will look the other way when a figure of authority comes to your door and puts a boot in your face?"

Satya is simultaneously reading George Orwell's *1984*, a fashionable read in the age of surveillance capitalism and strongman politics. His interactions echo the hesitant human response to the rapidly spreading Covid. The slow-motion collapse of civilisation makes the author/writer wonder: does fiction have a role any longer?

His first tale is of left-wing extremist Kundan, whom Satya is able to interview at a police camp in rural Bengal because the successful officials are from Bihar, one being a classmate of Satya's. Clearly, his access comes through privilege; unspoken is that it comes from a caste commonality. Satya's report, however, provides a twist in the tale.

The second is of his Delhi-based sister-in-law Shikha whose maid Jamuna is infected during the lockdown. Shikha takes in Jamuna's daughter Purnima, in preparation for exams. The building's residents, however, have strategised over WhatsApp and call the police, who take Shikha and Purnima into detention.

In the third, Satya's students participate in a Black Lives Matter protest in his college town (Kumar teaches at Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, New York) and afterwards, at a coffee shop, are confronted (in debate) by two white supremacists. To student Ishaan, that incident proves more valuable than all the classes he has taken, like Satya-taught "literature of 9/11" and "immigrant literature".

Satya explores not just fake news and anti-science, but also the equally damaging "soft" science. Vaani is a psych researcher, and psychology was once derided by the philosopher Karl Popper as pseudo-science. Such science, writes Kumar, with its misguided questions and conclusions does as much damage as "alternative facts".

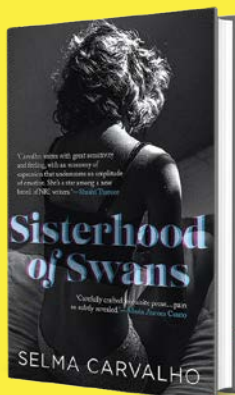
Kumar writes cleanly, directly and effortlessly. He does not rant or resort to purple prose. Hence, his is a worthwhile meditation on the zeitgeist.

Unresolved is the initial question. Perhaps because of how "banal is the banality of evil", and perhaps because the jackboot is something like Steve Bannon's "flooding the zone with shit". But then, reading Orwell, Satya comes to literature's relevance: "an expression of a tiny will to freedom", a remembrance of the past that the State tries to obliterate, of "a time outside this time". ■

—Aditya Sinha



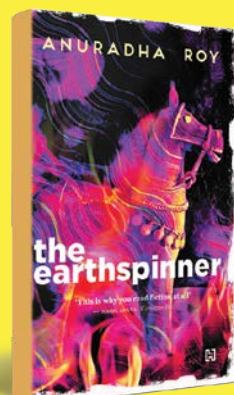
Though author Amitava Kumar has a different identity from the writer Satya, it is clearly an alter-ego



SISTERHOOD OF SWANS

by **Selma Carvalho**
SPEAKING TIGER
₹499; 184 pages

It is always a risk to put a farouche character at the centre of a novel. Carvalho finally raises the curtain on the lives of the diasporic Indian and the result is disturbing because you feel like you are entering the consciousness of a young woman who sees far too clearly for anyone's good.



THE EARTHSPINNER

by **Anuradha Roy**
HACHETTE INDIA
₹599; 232 pages

Anuradha Roy serves up prose that is lapidary in its precision, elegant in its execution and which does not allow beauty to cloud the horror of the present. This is a book I read slowly to make it last.

TURNING THE PAGE

Books you will need to clear shelf-space for in 2022

FICTION

RUN AND HIDE

by Pankaj Mishra
(Juggernaut)

In his first novel since *The Romantics* (1999), Mishra tells the story of three IIT friends—Arun, Aseem and Virendra. While the first two choose to pursue wealth, Arun opts for literature and quiet.

SOJOURN

by Amit Chaudhuri
(Faber)

In 2005, an Indian writer arrives in Berlin. His disorientation only amplifies. Eventually, he says, "I've lost my bearings—not in the city; in its history. The less sure I become of it, the more I know my way."

CITY OF INCIDENT

by Annie Zaidi (Aleph)

Living in cities, we don't see our neighbours, much less those who live on urban peripheries. Zaidi's stories of 12 struggling men and women might well be a revelation.

THE LOVES OF YURI

by Jerry Pinto
(Speaking Tiger)

Pinto's *Em and the Big Hoom* does have many fans. For them and us, news of his next novel is nothing short of thrilling. Set in 1980s Bombay, this is a story about friendship and first loves.

THE WOMAN ROBED WITH THE SUN

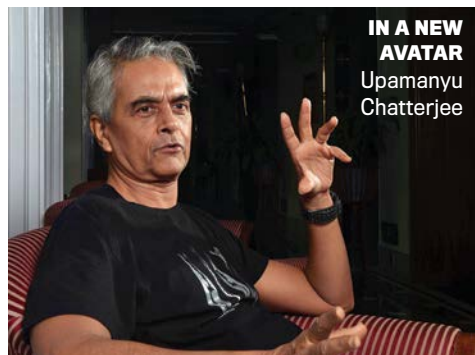
by K.R. Meera; translated by Ministhy (Penguin)
In Meera's novel about

Jezebel, a young Kerala doctor, we invariably hear echoes of her biblical namesake—both women have their backs against the wall and they both struggle hard to remain free.

EVERYTHING THE LIGHT TOUCHES

by Janice Pariat
(HarperCollins)

As Pariat's characters travel continents, there is discovery at hand. Not all the epiphanies are personal, however. As botany comes to play a vital role in the novel, the lives of plants become portals to selves.



IN A NEW AVATAR

Upamanyu Chatterjee

CRIMSON SPRING

by Navtej Sarna
(Aleph)

By choosing to fictionalise the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, Sarna, author and former diplomat, will make us revise our notion of history.

VILLAINY

by Upamanyu Chatterjee
(Speaking Tiger)

In Chatterjee's first crime novel, we are assured a body in the park, a wayward teenager and tense

courtroom scenes.

THE LIVING MOUNTAIN

by Amitav Ghosh
(HarperCollins)

It isn't just Ghosh's recent themes—greed, planetary collapse—that are urgent, but also the pace at which he is writing his books. This year, he will tell us a fable, that of Mahaparbat, the Living Mountain.

THE IMMORTAL KING RAO

by Vauhini Vara
(HarperCollins)

A winner of the O. Henry Award, Vara seems

to want to break all novelistic convention. She's written a book where everything from caste and memory to technology and climate change are key catalysts.

LOVE MARRIAGE

by Monica Ali
(Hachette)

Shortlisted for a Booker in 2003, Ali's *Brick Lane* remains one of the more feted books to have ever come out of the South Asian diaspora. Her new social comedy is

meant to be as moving and charming.

NIGHTS OF PLAGUE

by Orhan Pamuk; translated by Elkin Oklap
(Faber)

For four years,

NON-FICTION

REBELS AGAINST THE RAJ

Western Fighters for India's Freedom

by Ramachandra Guha (Allen Lane)

Not all of colonial India's relationships with the West were fraught. By telling us the story of seven foreigners who fought for our independence, Guha helps separate loyalty from unthinking patriotism.

AMBEDKAR

A Life by Shashi Tharoor (Aleph)

This isn't the first time Tharoor has taken to biography. His *Nehru: The Invention of India* struck a fine balance

between political and personal. He hopes to do the same with the life of B.R. Ambedkar.

IN THE LANGUAGE OF REMEMBERING

by Aanchal Malhotra
(HarperCollins)

In her first book, *Remnants of a Separation*, Malhotra focussed on objects Partition survivors had carried across the border. In this, she asks—how did future generations remember this past?

AKBAR

by Parvati Sharma
(Juggernaut)

Given the number of Akbar biographies

Orhan Pamuk had been writing a novel set during the 1901 plague. Speaking of how strange he felt after Covid struck, Pamuk recently said, "It was like something you do secretly had shown up."



MEDICINE MAN

Siddhartha
Mukherjee

LEISURE Books Special

out there, news of another shouldn't be too exciting. But given how intimately Sharma writes about Mughals—her *Jahangir* was a treat—we do have our hopes up.

LORDS OF THE DECCAN Southern India from the Chalukyas to the Cholas

by *Anirudh Kanisetti* (*Juggernaut*)
As a result of our preoccupation with the history of India's Gangetic belt, we often forget the rich stories of the south's Chalukya, Pallava, Rashtrakuta and Chola dynasties. Kanisetti rectifies this.

HOW PRIME MINISTERS DECIDE

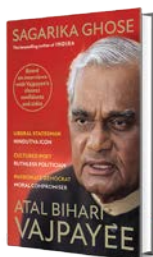
by *Neerja Chowdhury* (*Aleph*)

How did Indira Gandhi topple the Janata government? When did Narendra Modi agree to demonetisation? Chowdhury has the answers.

ATAL BIHARI VAJPAYEE

by *Sagarika Ghose* (*Juggernaut*)

There are many things Vajpayee is remembered for—oratory, poetry, statesmanship—but in Ghose's account, we see that his journey from obscurity to prime-ministership was also one of contradictions.



THIS FORMULA- TION CALLED DEMOCRACY

by *T. M. Krishna* (*Context*)

During the anti-CAA protests in 2019, the national anthem was sung in streets and the tricolour was suddenly more visible. Krishna asks how these symbols can help make a nation.

THE EASTERN GATE

War and Peace
in Nagaland,
Manipur and
India's Far East

by *Sudeep Chakravarti* (*Simon & Schuster*)

Chakravarti uses exclusive interviews with rebel leaders, politicians, bureaucrats, army and police personnel to give an insight into the ongoing attempts in Northeast India to transition from war to peace.

THE WORLD

by *Simon Sebag Montefiore* (*Hachette*)

If you have read

any of Montefiore's books, you would know how much he likes a panoramic view. In this, he will start with prehistoric humans and end in the present!

BURNING QUESTIONS

by *Margaret Atwood* (*Chatto & Windus*)

In this sometimes funny, sometimes prescient collection of essays, Atwood finds answers to questions both big and small: How do we live on our planet? What do zombies have to do with authoritarianism?

THE OMNI- SCIENT CELL

by *Siddhartha Mukherjee* (*Vintage*)

Mukherjee's *Emperor of All Maladies*, won a Pulitzer in 2011. His 2016 book, *The Gene*, was a breakthrough. He now tells the story of the cell and the birth of cellular medicine.



MYHTOLOGY

SHIVA

An Anthology

edited by *Karan Singh* (*Speaking Tiger*)

From Nataraja to Bholenath, Shiva has as many names as he does personalities. This anthology compiles writing about the god that are as varied as he is.



SELF-HELP

FREE FALL

My Experiments with Health and Wellness

by *Mallika Sarabhai* (*Speaking Tiger*)

Though Sarabhai covers the self-help gamut—weight-loss, pregnancy, how to quit smoking—in this book, she does so without ever sounding pedantic.

LET ME HIJACK

YOUR MIND

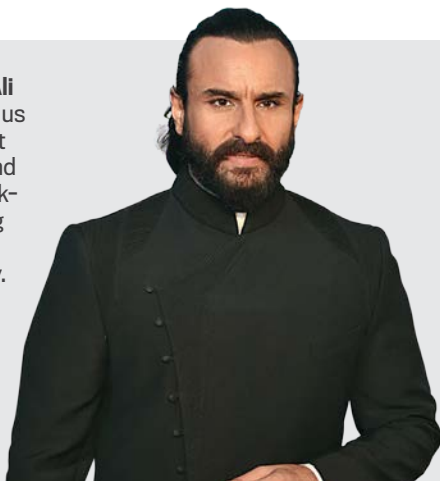
 by *Alyque Padamsee* (*Penguin*)

Being published posthumously, the book is being thought of as Padamsee's parting gift. Asking provocative questions, it wars against "stuffy thinking".

MEMOIR

In his new memoir, *Commissioner for Lost Causes* (Penguin), **Arun Shourie** recalls his encounters with PMs, CMs, judges and editors. In the memoir he is writing

for HarperCollins, **Saif Ali Khan**, we hope, will give us a candid account of what it means to be Pataudi and Bollywood royalty. Speaking Tiger will be releasing the memoirs of **Wendy Doniger** and **Mark Tully**. We will likely find a common thread in both accounts—how India can be made one's own.



Q+A

“WE’RE ALL NOAH NOW”

In his new book, *Eden*, Devdutt Pattanaik explores Jewish, Christian and Islamic lore from a uniquely Indian perspective. The results are riveting

Q. When looking at Abrahamic myths through an Indian lens, how did you avoid overt comparisons?

When you see two things, you will compare and contrast. But I don't think comparison necessarily creates a hierarchy. I never say one is better than the other. I think sometimes people's minds are narrow. I aim to expand the mind, so people start accommodating more than one idea simultaneously.

Q. How hard was illustrating this book?

It has been a dream of mine to illustrate biblical stories with an Indian touch ever since I saw Sassanian paintings of Islamic lore, Ottoman miniatures and those biblical drawings from Ethiopia. I would invariably ask myself—how would the Tower of Babel look if an Indian had drawn it?

Q. What role do myths and folklore play in a Covid world?

Take the story of Noah, for example. He is on this boat in the middle of a flood, hoping that all the animals on his ark survive. Similarly, us humans, locked in our homes, waiting for Covid to retreat, are all Noahs, too. The human metaphor has a power to connect.

Q. Are ancient myths naturally relevant to the 21st century, or is it the task of the mythologist to place them in context?

All stories are trying to satisfy a human need. Mythological stories are particularly powerful since they always talk in terms which secular narratives don't—origins of the world, end of the world, purpose of life. The story of the Big Bang doesn't energise you. It just says that you're a particle. Scientists cannot explain things like jealousy, anger and misery. Stories do that.

—with Shreevatsa Nevatia



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Air Accidental Insurance	NIL	₹ 1,00,00,000
Airport Lounge Access	NIL	Complimentary 2 per quarter
Lost Card Liability	₹ 50,000	₹ 6,00,000
Purchase Protection	NIL	₹ 1,00,000
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IMPS	FREE	FREE
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